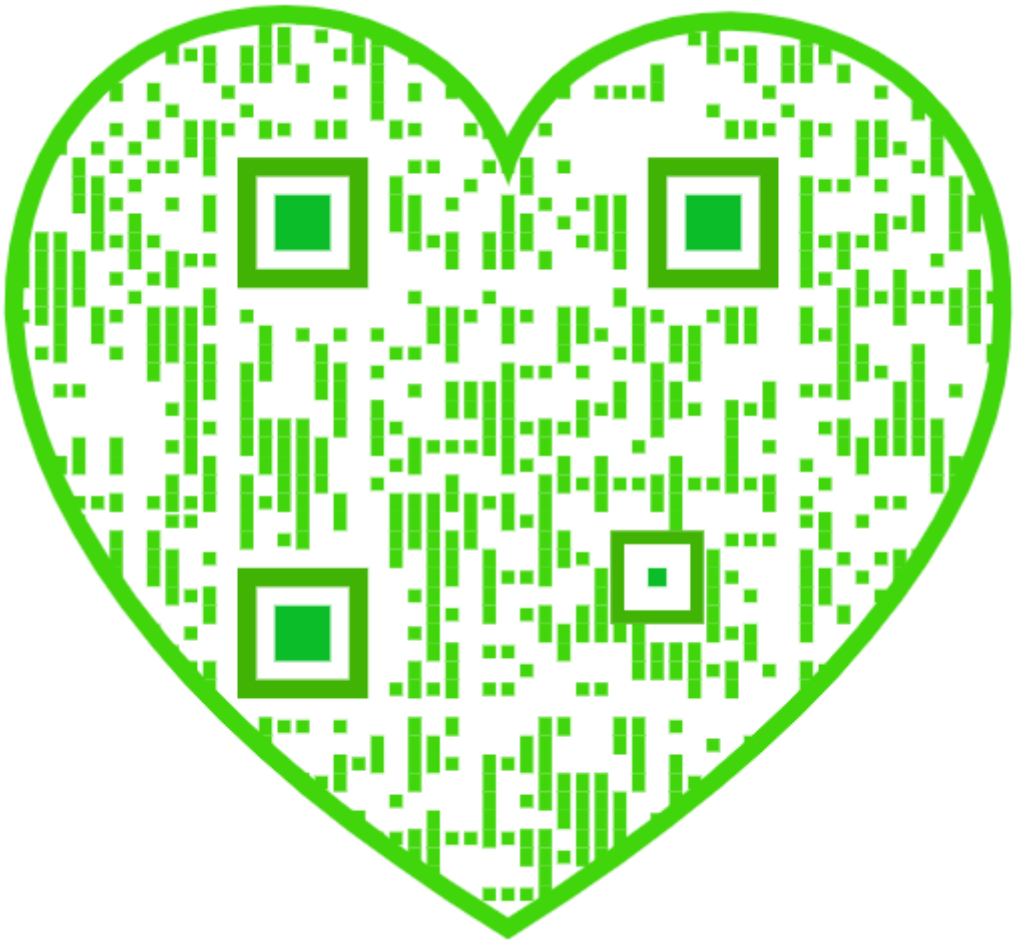

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IN

MORALS AND RELIGION,

AS DISCOVERABLE IN THE FAITH AND CHARACTER OF MEN.

BY THE REV. HERMAN HOOKER, M. A.

1872

There is a peculiar evidence of divine truth which you never see—see what else you will—if you judge of it merely by the intellect; much less, if the intellect be swayed by adverse affections. But when the repugnance of the heart is overcome, we have this evidence in the substance, the relish of the truth; we see a conspicuous excellency in it, which approves it to the mind, and confirms it by a happy experience of its power and sweetness. * * * * * It is a most specious deception, that which enables you to disbelieve all you will, with the pretence of faith, and the colour of believing all you should.

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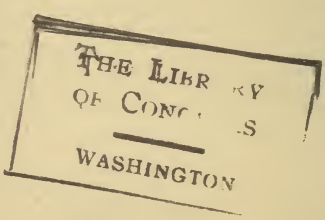

PREFACE.

Numbers live in the neglect of religion, without knowing or considering the cause of their indifference to it. They profess to receive the Bible as the word of God, and if they do so, their conduct is inexplicable and opposed to all reason and analogy. There is, therefore, ground for presuming they are in error on this point; and if they are so, it is indispensable that they should be undeceived, as a first step to a correct understanding of their spiritual condition. This incongruity between the accredited faith and the conduct of men is so common, and in degrees so various, that it is to be feared we are ceasing to regard it as an exception to a general law—as something monstrous in practice—and are satisfying ourselves with the virtue of acknowledging it, or perhaps of declaiming against it, while we take not the trouble to inquire into the reason and enormity of it.

This inquiry the author has endeavoured to conduct—with good design he knows—with what good effect he leaves for the reader to judge. As the discussion advances, much is said, referring to the varieties of human

character, and to the secret operations and tendencies of unbelief, suitable to be reflected on by devout believers, and yet not ultimately, it is thought, impertinent to the steady design of the work.

Having shown, or presumed, that numbers may justly be denominated infidels, who do not so consider themselves, and are not generally so considered by others, notice is taken of the confirmation which this view receives from the Scriptures, and of the adaptation of the doctrines of Christianity to the known nature and wants of man, and to the ends which it proposes to effect, and in the accomplishment of which man is made, what he is not and cannot be in any other way, both blessed and deserving to be so.

The inference, then, which is more or less disclosed in every branch of the subject, is, that if our views of Christianity do not renovate our natures and sway our conduct, it is because they are delusory, the mere allowances which an evil heart has made in its own vindication, and in which it loses sight of itself and of God together, while looking as at an image of its own creation, and which it kneels to and worships as having qualities that are in accordance with itself—which yet itself has imparted, or rather are itself again.

Philadelphia, June 28, 1836.

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POPULAR INFIDELITY.

CHAPTER I.

Vanity of man separate from his immortality—The chances of being finally lost—Plans and hopes of safety—Strange contrariety of faith and practice—Deep delusion—The art and success of spiritual foes—Infidelity not readily owned—Persons chargeable with it in practice—The Reader—His candour—His interest in the subject—Its difficulty no discouragement.

The transient nature of his existence, as well as the little he can know and do at best, stamps an inexpressible meanness on man, if we contemplate him aside from the hope of immortality. But regarding him as destined to live beyond the present scene, to live in bliss or wo, in glory or dishonour, according to the character of his agency here, every thing about him seems important. Indeed, the danger is, that our respect for him as a being of this high destiny, may hinder our being duly shocked with his degeneracy, when he voluntarily forsakes the end of

his existence, and assumes a character, which, had it been his by creation, would only awaken surprise and distrust of the wisdom of his Creator. We should, in that case, see nothing in it for admiration, but every thing for wonder and dissatisfaction. But, mean as it would then appear, we now seem to be little offended that the multitude live as without knowledge or concern for their immortality. The hope they have of living for ever, and of answering ends suitable to so noble a design, serves, it may be, to raise them in their own estimation, but has no control over their pursuits; and looking to their improvidence and their passion for sensible things, we see little prospect of their recovery to spiritual life. This, however, is not the worst of their condition. They have lost all right perceptions of their own character and of the objects which they must understand and love as the appointed means of renewal, and yet follow their convictions, such as they are, without doubting that they are right; so that the chief danger that they will fall short of their calling, seems to arise from their disposition 'to order their own steps,' and to confide in their own views, without making due allowance for their nature and its proneness to misconception.

Almost every one has a plan or hope of being saved, which supposes his character to be very

different from what it really is. We never find any one living in the quiet expectation of being for ever depraved and miserable, but the great majority are living quietly in a practice that tends directly and strongly to this result. They continue in a practice which they pretend not to justify as innocent, and can hardly be said to consider as sinful, yet a practice which has confessedly deceived thousands, and in which thousands have confessedly perished. Still, they apprehend no evil, and cherish a secret expectation that all is to turn out well with them in the end. They have no idea of things as they are; they judge not of themselves as of others; they are in a deep sleep, and the most that can often be done, is to keep them wakeful enough for worldly dreams; and did they but think them dreams, they would soon perceive themselves poor and destitute, without any reasonable concern or action for relief. But they do not so think; the god of this world surrounds them with a false effulgence, which confuses their vision, and gives a deceptive appearance to every object, and the true light which clears the reason and the affections 'shines not unto them.' Like some creatures we know, they seem to see best through a medium which is dark to nobler beings, and that object which should give light and joy is without glory to them, lulling

them to slumber, and justly making them a spectacle and wonder to all others.

But the rest they have, is but a sleeping storm; the security they feel, is but blindness to danger; the freedom they claim, is but a slavery grown easy and natural to them; the victory they are ready to arrogate to themselves, is but the triumph of their foes, in which they are permitted to participate, only to complete it. Their prison and chains are not fully prepared, and they are encouraged to assume the honours and the airs of victors, only to finish the deception, and to make them the more loyal to their masters. Thus their spiritual enemies improve every advantage, while they make no resistance, and have no warfare as *they* view it. They have served Satan so well that his service is freedom, and no stoop for them, so long as they are not required to call him master; and, as it is his service, not his title, which he wishes them to own, they have no disagreement. Power of darkness and delusion, he first darkens the mind to delude it, and then perpetuates the spell by setting it off for a fancy-piece of light, flattering the subject of it with marks of reason and excellence, which he indulges him to call his own.

Nothing short of the prevalence of some delusion, deeper and more influential than men are generally aware of, is sufficient to account for this indifference

to spiritual concerns. Writers may ascribe it to infidelity, but the bare evidence of the Christian system does not affect it: that system is professedly believed by the generality of those who manifest this indifference. They disclaim infidelity as a crime, as a baseless fabric, and are shocked at the bare name of it as applied to them. Indeed, if you could persuade them that they are infidels, they would not feel safe for a moment, and their first inquiry would not be for truth and evidence, but for a way of escape from guilt. But they have always had a respect for the Bible as an inspired book; the existence of a Supreme Being, with such attributes and purposes as it ascribes to him, they have never doubted: and they are not now to be convicted of infidelity. That they have not a saving belief of these truths they admit; but then they have such a belief as they deem respectful to them, and likely to lead on to it. They might, perhaps, be convinced that they have not such a belief as deters them from sins and crimes which set God and his word at defiance; still they insist that it is *a belief*. It appears to have little or no influence on their practice, still they regard it as a very important affair, and would not part with it on any account. They acknowledge their accountability and sinfulness, and, though sinning daily, claim that they are less daring,

and more innocent and respectful, than those who deny both. They have the happy way of resolving the matter so that they keep the thing, and shun the name of it. It is satisfactory to them, not that it has any reason in it; not that it proves any superior goodness in them; not indeed that it restrains them from any iniquity; but that it tallies with their household notions and conceptions of the beauty of faith, and the deformity of its opposite.

There are two sorts of virtuous, not pious, people, which deserve some designation;—those, who, from a natural delicacy of their physical and mental structure, run virtuously without a principle of action, or a rule of judgment, exhibiting the most attractive graces of thought and feeling, responding to every call of sympathy and regard, and bearing the richest fruits, which yet are as 'apples of gold in pictures of silver,' merely representations of the beautiful reality:—and those, who, without any uncommon advantage of nature, or exemption from temptation, have preserved a certain health and harmony of exercise in their moral powers, and kept themselves within the attraction of virtue, its colours not greatly changing in their view, and they, though captives to the powers of the present world, yet retaining some freedom of the spirit, and dwelling in a kind of mid-heaven, whence they look down with a conscious-

ness of superiority to the rest of their species as needful to sustain them in their elevation, as it is indicative of their imperfection. Thus it is possible so to yield the heart to the claims of justice and humanity, and so to occupy the mind with ennobling objects and investigations, as to preserve, in a commendable degree, the freshness of the moral feelings. But this is all a night-growth, liable to perish in the morning; a painted edifice, outwardly new and beautiful, while its timber is struck with decay, and will bend and break with the storm. A discarding of God and his counsel, self-reliance, self-aggrandizement, atheism, is the life of the structure: it is the heart which conveys vigour to all its living extremes. It was never reared, and it can never subsist, without the service of pride, vanity, a love of promotion, and the praise of men; and these do not more corrupt than enfeeble every thing they fashion and control. They have no part in the 'workmanship' of God:[1] they do not so much as seek his aid, or acknowledge him in any of their doings.

These remarks may serve to characterize great numbers who would start at the charge of infidelity; who value themselves for virtues, which, on a close inspection, appear to infer a want of faith; who, to say the least, live in the habitual neglect of religion,

[1] Eph. ii. 10, good men are called his 'workmanship.'

without knowing or considering the ground of their indifference to it. These points will, in course, be the subject of investigation.

We can presume on no ability to do justice to our conceptions of the subject upon which we are entering; much less, that we entertain conceptions worthy of its importance. But if we be able in any measure to clear the way of the reader, and start such trains of thought as, when pursued out and applied with the faithfulness of an honest inquirer, shall reconcile him to a just view of his condition, we shall have no fear that he will consider his time ill spent, though the chief advantage he gains should in justice be accredited to himself. More than this; if he shall allow to us the credit of an interest in his welfare, and deem *that* the amiable, and a sense of duty the graver, reason of our inquiries, we will not be so injurious to the courtesy of such judgment, as to suspect that slight disappointments may deter him from pursuing them, while there is a possibility of attaining the good they propose.

If he has duly considered what others are, though he has not so duly considered what he is, he will not forget that he is of the same nature with them; nor will it appear a thing incredible that he should be convicted of faults and errors in his estimate of himself, which, if they be more refined and less

palpable, are not less destructive than those he sees in others. Indeed, should he prove to be gravely criminal, he will not think any previous suspicion of it an impertinence, or consider himself as wronged by conviction, but only favoured with a discovery which candour and interest oblige him to welcome as the dawning of a better mind, a coming to himself which not more necessarily precedes all right reasoning than all spiritual excellence;—from which last he may have gone so far, that the loss itself is not mourned, while the miseries of it are vainly felt and deplored. It would be an unjustifiable aspersion, if he be known to be even well affected towards himself, to suppose he would quarrel with a truth, or shut his eyes to the evidence of it, when it could be improved to his own exaltation, and to the furtherance of his Creator's will. We would be too jealous of the honour of our nature, claiming nothing for its goodness, to presume him thus destitute of all decency of regard for himself, and for the divine authority and wisdom. But if we grant him to be of a considering humour, not ready to break with his Maker for eternity, not doubting his justice, his goodness, his absolute perfection, and still, not seeing them as realities, not affected by what he believes, or rather, is apprehensive of,—it is not too much to expect, it is the least that can with civility be looked

for, that he will see he cannot with any show of reason vindicate his continuance in a state wherein he blushes to own himself either the friend or the foe of God, but wishes to be ranked as standing on anomalous and neutral ground; for this would be but a nonsuit of his claims to any other than a brute importance, since it is only when we are without reason that we can be without character. We may think we feel indifferent to an object, but if that object be one of incomparable perfection and interest, it must have claims upon our highest regard, and, when these claims are enforced to the exclusion of all inferior objects which we have chosen in its place, it will be found, that not to have loved this the noblest and best of all, is not a mere worthless indifference, but the cherishing of the elements of an unappeasable enmity to it. It is not more clearly a part of the great design of the universe that all bodies should tend to a common centre, than it is the chief design of rational creatures that they should tend with strongest affection to the greatest and most worthy object of such regard; nor is this law of the material system more needful and proper to its destined action, than that of spirits to their safe and rational action, while both alike are allowed to attract smaller objects, and to feel their attraction, yet only as parts of a whole, and in pursuance of this

their chiefest end. Why, therefore, one is not in love with this object, but goes counter to the ordinance of his nature, as well as to the claims and commands of Him whose claims could not be greater nor his commands more reasonable, and whose wills concerning us, expressing both his perfection and intending ours, may be summed up in one, 'be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' enjoining on us his likeness in order to our participating in his felicity,—is a question that may reasonably claim his first attention; and which, now that he deems it an unjustifiable reflection upon his faith, to infer that he denies its importance, he should be presumed to approach with candour and self-distrust, and as caring less to obtain that which he cannot keep, than to possess himself of that good which he knows he cannot lose.

CHAPTER II.

Moral character and speculative belief—Man consists of a double nature, half angel and half beast—Natural process downward—Tendency to be less and less spiritual in the affections and the understanding—Views of moral excellence, how acquired—Standard of comparison—Moral attributes of the Deity—Danger of misconceiving them—Proneness to error from the corruption of human nature—From the limited faculties of the mind—A case supposed—Diffidence of our capacity to judge correctly of mora qualities, the truest wisdom.

It was stated in the outset, that the great danger of our losing the chief and only durable good arose principally from a too great trust in our own judgment of spiritual things, without duly considering the influence of our corrupt nature upon the perceptions and decisions of the mind. The operation of moral character upon speculative belief, though difficult to detect in particular cases, is yet in some measure understood and admitted by all. Both our sensibility to moral qualities and our perception of them may change and decay from neglect, or be choked and overrun by the growth of other and opposing principles. "Man, as he consists of a double nature, 'flesh and spirit,' so is he placed in a middle rank, betwixt an angel, which is a spirit,

and a beast, which is flesh; partaking of the qualities and performing the acts of both. He is angelical in his understanding, in his sensual affections bestial; and to which of these he most inclineth and conformeth himself, that part wins more of the other, and gives a denomination to him: so as he, that was before half angel and half beast, if he be drowned in sensuality, hath lost the angel, and is become a beast; if he be wholly taken up with heavenly meditations, he hath quit the beast, and is improved angelical. It is hard to hold an equal temper; either he must degenerate into a beast, or be advanced to an angel. Mere reason sufficiently apprehends the difference of the condition.'"[1] It will not, perhaps, be doubted, it is so evident that it will not here be reasoned, that the process in every man is naturally downward, to the gratification of his inferior nature, and to the love and pursuit of sensible things. As the consequence of this, it is equally evident that he does not see either the objects of sense or those of faith in their true character. He is in the case of the blind man, who, when asked if he saw aught, was sure he saw something, which yet was not a proper sight, for he saw 'men as trees.' He sees wealth, beauty, and honour; but it is not a proper sight, because he sees not all about them; he sees them not as a snare,

[1] Bishop Hall's 'Select Thoughts,' No. lxii.

and does not sanely estimate their use to him. He sees the pleasures and enticements of sense; yet it is a question whether he sees them or no, because he sees them only as harmless and desirable: there is no reason in the sight. He sees all temporal goods; but we can hardly say whether he has a sight of them or no, because he sees them not as they are; he sees them 'as trees walking;' he does not see the reason and beauty of them; he does not see them as beams and proofs of that perfection of them, which is reserved as 'glory to be revealed.' But, becoming less and less spiritual in his affections and understanding, the derangement in his sight of spiritual objects must be still greater. What was lovely and tasteful in moral excellence gradually disappears, and the very virtues comprised in it are for the most part mean and spiritless in his view: still, he reasons about them, and fully confides in his own decisions. He never doubts the soundness of his views, but there is an inconsistency between them and his feelings and conduct, which does not appear with regard to any other subject. If we can find the cause of this, all difficulty will vanish, and we shall be able to account for much, in the practice of men, which seems not to be compatible with any just appreciation of their own welfare, or of the character of God; much, which is precisely as we should

suppose it would be, if the light that is in them were indeed darkness.

We would not be understood to deny that men may have views of moral excellence much purer than their practice; but it is certain that their moral character does more or less modify their views, and, in this way, involve them in most dangerous errors. This truth may be discerned in the very process by which we arrive at a judgment of moral qualities. Our nearest approaches to the discovery of the excellence of any object are made by comparing it with other objects, which are more or less excellent. In such a comparison, its advantage, or disadvantage, is the more visible, for the brightness or obscurity of those with which it is contrasted. Who, for instance, can discover a single colour on a fabric in which all colours are intermingled? Who can have any proper ideas of degrees in benevolent actions, unless he has had, or witnessed in others, an exercise of malevolence? Who can declare one countenance more beautiful than another, if he has not in his mind some standard of comeliness, with which to compare it? It is thus evident that we must form our judgment of the distinctive excellence of objects, by the process of comparison.

Let us, now, consider the probable effects of this process upon our notions of the moral attributes

of God. These attributes must be designated by words, commonly used and understood. Is he holy, just, and good? If these terms are not understood in their application to the character of men, we shall understand them as little, when they are applied to God. Our notions of what is just or good in man will enter into all our reasonings, and form the basis of our thoughts concerning what is just or good in God. The same is true of all his moral attributes. They exist in him without defects; in man, with the blemishes of imperfection and guilt, and as dim shadows and uncertain semblances of the divine reality. But the dimness and the uncertainty are all his own: nothing can be laid to the charge of God; he made man in his own image; the fountains of his being were all pure and his sight was perfect, till he corrupted them and chose his darkness, and now that abundant light is come, and a new way opened for his recovery of this blessedness, he is held fully responsible for the errors of his judgment. But while he remains in his darkness, and has not the relish of his blessedness, what errors may he not commit, associated as he is with beings of universal and acknowledged imperfection—himself naturally as imperfect, as the greatest profligate he beholds. We will suppose him called to contemplate the moral perfections of God, and that they are designated,

as they must be, by terms, the import of which he has learned from their usage among men, as applied to themselves. In proportion as the acts or qualities in himself and others which are called just and good, are imperfect, will not his notions of God, formed according to the use of language in reference to such acts or qualities, be inadequate and unworthy? If he believes, and doubtless he does, that he is as good as any around him, and, although imperfect in all his moral exercises, regards himself with complacency, upon what principles shall we conclude, that he will be likely to entertain, in these respects, higher views of God than of himself?

We have thus far considered the effects of this process, as if man had no temptations or promptings to reason otherwise than honestly and impartially on the subject, and on this admission, we see no ground for inferring that his conclusions will be safe and correct. But when we come to make proper allowance for his self-love, his ignorance, his passions, his false interests, there is no chance that he will be either impartial or correct in his judgment. If he forms and cherishes higher views of the divine excellence than of his own, he must be dissatisfied with himself, and that is disagreeable to nature; he must also live in perpetual fear of the divine displeasure, and we commonly see no evidence of this in his

conduct. The wickedest men are often the most self-complacent and fearless, and they must either not think at all on this subject, or think to no purpose. Their passions have become such reasoners, that they justify their own indulgence. An argument in favour of a chosen error, which would once have put them on their guard as being fallacious, is now sound and convincing; and, as they falsely estimate their interests, it would be the happiest, the best contrivance in the world, if they could have every thing in their pleasures and pursuits as it now is, without disappointments, and with the approbation of God. If they could have the matter thus, depraved and unthankful as they are, they would have no self-reproaches, and no more shame than an angel that has never sinned. They would eat, drink, and indulge themselves, without a thought of God; they would think of any thing more than him, and indeed, he can gain their attention now, only by his terrors. He lays his hand upon them, and they tremble and look up, but no sooner is it removed and the shock past, than he is forgotten. This shows what they think of sin, and what bright reasoners they must be on moral excellence. Their passions, and interests as they understand them, are in direct conflict with just views of the character of God, and to suppose that they will judge impartially in this case, is

to give them credit for a disinterestedness which they never show in any other, and which, therefore, it is irrational to expect they will show in this.

Their ignorance also renders them incompetent judges of the right or wrong of the divine proceedings. But they never think of this; they try them by their own standard of what is right and proper, with as much confidence as they would, if they knew every thing. This is a fruitful source of error, and of disaffection towards the character of God. According to this rule many events appear to them unjust or cruel, and such as they confidently believe they should not have permitted, had they possessed the control of them. In this way, they easily rise in the esteem of their own character; they impute faults to God which they do not discover in themselves, and turn his counsellors and reprovers, whenever any thing crosses their wishes. What ought we to suppose such men think of God, especially when it is no secret what they think of themselves? Is it any wonder that they are not alarmed at their condition? Do they believe in the true God, or have they created, fancied one, who needs their advice, or, at least, is in favour with their desires?

From the limited nature of his faculties, it is also clear that he, who does not submit his heart and understanding to the will of God, in full reliance

upon the wisdom and equity of all his dispensations, will sometimes fall into the greatest errors, and the most confident questioning of the perfections of God. Suppose he witnesses a good action—one that is a certain duty in the instance before him, which, however, in a little time, is found to have operated, in a way that could not be foreseen, injuriously to interests more extensive and important than those which it immediately promoted, he cannot still doubt that the action was good, and it might have been good so far as the design of the agent is to be considered; he regarded it at the time so clearly a duty, that the neglect of it would have been thought proof of great imperfection, and, if it be supposed that an Omniscient Being, seeing all effects in their causes, would not have performed such an act, he would, certainly, have been thought imperfect and criminal. Independent, then, of any influence from association with depraved beings, if he has not that confidence in God which constrains him to believe that what he does, though it be apparently evil and injurious, is yet necessarily wise and good, he will often charge him with folly, and refuse submission to his will.

When, therefore, we connect the ignorance of man with his estrangement from God, whose ways, according to the rule by which so ignorant a being determines what is good, will often appear to

be evil, and consider also, that he is associated with beings as depraved as himself, whose *virtues* constitute a medium of deceitful and tarnished lustre with which he is prone to clothe all invisible agents, can we believe that he will form correct opinions of the moral attributes of God? Is it reasonable to suppose that he will have just ideas; will so abstract himself from the imperfection that is in, and around, him, as to have vivid and pure conceptions of attributes of which he can have no notion, except as he compares them with such feelings within him as correspond to their nature, and with such shadows of them as are fleeting before him? If he could not learn the height and dimensions, the beauty and costliness of a temple, the like of which he had never seen, from surveying its ruins; if he could not conceive properly of the splendour of the sun, from observing the moon which reflects his light so dimly, that, with all the aid of surrounding stars, it is night when he is absent, how shall he judge of that 'excellent glory' which comprises and excels all others, by the blemished and dying lights within him—by the dust that remains, but scarcely glitters, amidst the ashes of the ruin in which he is involved? What image will he frame from the materials before him? He hears not the voice of God, and no cloud, no symbol of his presence and glory, rests upon the mountains.

Will he think of a 'golden calf,' or will he bow to stocks and stones? He might do so, if education and custom had not taught him better. He must now have a more refined and specious idolatry; he must have in speculation and profession what he calls the true God; but in heart, in worship, he will have images without number, if they may be without name. Even as he estimates the character of God, he makes him an image, a being not such as he is, but such as he would have him. If unrestrained by prevailing modes of belief and expression, and unassisted by divine revelation, he would conceive of God as loving what he loves; as hating what he hates; and as possessed of such virtues, and only such, as he possesses. Having never seen a being of greater excellence than himself, he would form all who are invisible, in his own image, and think of them only as propitious to his own cherished gratifications. This process of an evil heart, by which it likens all things to itself; this tendency to misconceive all truth at variance with his propensities, no education, no usage, no creed, can fully counteract. He takes his notions of the perfection of any moral quality, from that form of it in which it exists in his own mind; and this individual complexion, this identity, he transfers to it, when he contemplates it in the character of God. If he has

wrong notions of any moral quality in his own mind or practice, yet, as he delights to cherish them, as they are a part of himself, and the best he has, they will prevail in his conceptions of God, in whose attributes he is so sharp to discover the colours of his own character. There is no glass in which he will not see himself; no moral perfection which he will not blemish with his likeness. Hence the difficulty of convincing him of his guilt; hence his bold, his complacent perseverance in the beaten ways of transgression; hence his dreams of pardon, his venturing on the mercy of God, when his peril is greatest, and his sins call loudest for retribution. He believes indeed; he has a God and a faith in him, but it is something worse than infidelity, with respect to the word and attributes of that glorious Being whom it aspires to honour; it not only discredits what he is, and what he says, but it ascribes to him qualities which he has not, and which would bring him down to a level with his sinful creatures. It 'changes his truth into a lie, and his glory into an image made like unto corruptible man,' but he sees not the criminality of it; he gives it the name of reverent service, though he is himself too irreverent, too thoughtless, to know what he has done, or, knowing, to feel the evil of it.

It is surely not well for the best of men to confide

greatly in their understanding of spiritual excellence. Their imperfections will cast their shadows upon the brightest objects, and with all their desire to understand them aright, with their greatest readiness to suspect and accuse themselves, they cannot attain to this perfection; they will sometimes greatly disparage God by their unworthy, though their best, thoughts of him. Under pretence of celebrating one of his perfections, they may depress and wrong others, and make them repugnant the one to the other. What then shall be thought of the difficulties which sinners have with the character and dispensations of God? What shall be thought of their competence as judges of either? What concern should they have, lest, while they endeavour to frame a consistent notion of God, they leave out of it every thing that is truly a perfection; and, lest, through their proneness to make their conception of him agree with themselves, they cause it to disagree with him? As an absolutely perfect Being, he comprehends in himself all real perfections, without contradiction or repugnance, and they can neither add to, or take from, him, without sullying his character, and abstracting from it less or more of that salutary influence which it is adapted to exert upon their hearts. It is suggested by all they know of themselves and others, and most consonant with

their caution in other cases, that they should be wary, lest they speak too hastily concerning what he does; lest they magnify the greatness of his mercy so as to lose sight of their guilt and danger in it, or make it exclude other attributes which are essential to his perfection, and which concern them not less than that which they are most forward to extol. When difficulty with him occurs, it is but decent and modest to defer our opinion; it is stupid and arrogant not to suspect and inquire whether the fault be not wholly in our own minds; in that narrowness which cannot commodiously entertain the boundless perfections of the Deity, and comprehend their points of union, or their union which completes the glory of each; in that indolence which declines patient investigation and prevents us from doing what we can, or that self-conceit which disposes us to be satisfied with our convictions, right or wrong, and imposes on us an ability of doing what we cannot, of understanding that which is incomprehensible, of appreciating that which is so excellent that we do not relish it, and could not even bear to behold it aright.

It is difficult to express the rashness of a sinner, who treads confidently, and figures largely, on this holy ground: more difficult to conceive that he can think it rational to confide in the worthiness and

adequacy of his thoughts of God, especially if they do not disaffect him with himself and his sins. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon: that which excels, he has never seen; the other is but a reflection of it; it serves indeed to relieve the darkness of the night, but is not sufficient for the purposes of the day; nothing minute can be seen in it, and he, who should attempt to frame by it a nice and complicated structure, would be guilty of great presumption, and might be ruined, if not by the needless expense, yet by the dangerous action, of it. When a man has once established a character for holiness and virtue, if a known impostor brings even plausible accusations against him, and endeavours, not without argument, and with great apparent sincerity, to show that he is no better than his corrupt and lawless neighbours, nobody would believe him. To entertain for a moment such testimony, would not only be esteemed weak and uncharitable, but a just ground for charging us with a desire to believe it, or a likeness to the character falsely ascribed to the innocent. And when it is considered what an impostor the human heart is, what sinners experience of its impositions in themselves and others, and what inducements they have, or rather imagine they have, to extenuate its

wickedness, or shut their eyes to it, (which is so great that none but God can know it,)[1] how shall they justify it to their reason, or make their conduct consistent with the rule of their judgment in other cases, when they arbitrarily confide in their perception and appreciation of the attributes of God; in the testimony of their deceitful hearts to his spotless holiness and untainted righteousness, which alike prove his displeasure with them, and require their displeasure with themselves!

[1] The prophet Jeremiah, when contemplating the wickedness and deceitfulness of the heart, exclaims, 'Who can know it?' as much as to say, no man can.

CHAPTER III.

Various modes in which human character is disclosed—Prevalence of hypocrisy—Its tendency to self-deception and infidelity—Morality of secular men a proof of their infidelity—Devotees of fashion—Dignity of their vocation—Their irreligion—Their freedom from the affectation of goodness—Their errors—The best virtues of unconverted men seem not to acknowledge a God—They infer the greatest misconception of personal character—They centre in creatures, and afford the clearest evidence of a faithless heart—Peculiar depravity of such persons—Their sinning without a motive—Things which try men's souls—Their complaints and their pretensions illustrate their infidelity—Their self-importance and misery—Contrast of their reasoning and conduct with the suggestions of faith—Happiness of a mind resting on God.

Men disclose their real character in many ways. Small incidents, rightly considered, are very decisive of it. They show by signs and complaints, to which they are apt to attach little or no import, what is in them, and what they think of God and of his word. And what individuals disclose from any cause or event, is adequate proof of what all others, having the same principles, would do in a similar case. It is true that we are apt to look with surprise upon the conduct of others, as though we were incapable of doing what they have done, yet this is a feeling which universal observation condemns as founded

in ignorance and self-deception, and as one of the coverts in which an evil heart conceals itself from our view. Were we to take the trouble to examine into our own history, we should find we have, from time to time, committed acts and sins, to which, at different periods, we had thought ourselves in no degree exposed, and have come to a hardihood in impenitence, and in neglect of our duties, which, in a season of more tenderness of conscience, we contemplated with horror. Every year of life is marked with changes of this character. They prove that we know little what we are, or what we shall be; that 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool,' no wiser for experience, and as confident of future goodness as if he had been only goodness itself from the beginning;—a 'fool,' because all he can know is something concerning God or his creatures, and he knows nothing of either—nothing, certainly, that deserves the repute of understanding.

This deception is seldom so complete but it is known to himself, more seldom so well set off but it is seen by others to be a counterfeit of goodness, a confidence of virtue that does but express the loss of sensibility to it. Hypocrisy is often spun of a very fine thread, so fine that even the spinner can hardly tell it from the material it is designed to

represent; but, when he affects to put it off as better than that, and to be surprised that *that* so often fails and disappoints our hopes, he may be suspected of too much interest in the matter to be honest. His confidence is the fruit of success, not of excellence: just as the counterfeiter is confident, and sets the standard value upon his spurious coin, both because it will bring him that, and because, if he lets it go for less, it would expose the secret of his profession. His assurance increases with the success and profit of his trade; he comes soon to think well of that and of himself; seeks the best society and connexions, under the colour and pretence of a well earned fortune and reputation; and, taken by others for what he affects to be, no one resents any suspicion of his honour or integrity more sharply, or is more clamorous against the misdeeds of others. But expose his crimes—bring him out of his concealments—cover him with shame and contempt, and he will prove a mystery of iniquity; his capabilities surprise himself as well as others; all of the decency, the philanthropy, the seemingness of the gentleman, which he had, is gone at once, and his heart swarms with every species of crime and meanness. So it will turn out with all the more refined and less criminal degrees of hypocrisy. They conceal powers of evil which, in certain emergencies, under

great pressures, or for chances of great advantage, will lay by the mask, and exhibit a front of brass that shocks and shames every beholder. Examples of this are occurring every day through all the gradations of society, and in individuals as little suspected as any others; some of them so distinguished that everybody knows and speaks of them; but others, and by far the greater number, known only to those more directly affected by them. What we wish the reader to observe as pertinent to our inquiry is, that the preceding remarks show that men generally have lower views of moral honesty, and of all the qualities essential to the fear of God and a respect for his revealed commands, than they pretend, or suppose, they have; and that their faith, as they will have it called, is not a faith in things as they are, but involves a radical misconception of the objects which it embraces.

There is another view of the subject which, though disagreeable to nature, is yet worthy to be considered. All men are ready to condemn hypocrisy, if not to boast that they are clear of it; the very word is odious, and yet nothing is more common than some degree of it. If men, good and bad, were taken for what they affect to be, they would generally pass for more than they are worth. No doubt some are suspected of evil wrongfully: suspicion, however, is

gloomy, and usually the issue of guilt: but knowledge is lustrous; it is truth revealed and comprehended. Genuine goodness so sharpens the sight of inward corruption, that it is prone to be more self-distrustful, than distrustful of others; but what of humility or goodness is genuine in most men, for want of due caution, is apt to be so pressed down with adverse mixtures, that it is seldom visibly uppermost in their speech and conduct. Paul saw nothing in the third heavens that was of a nature to foster pride; but if he dwelt upon it merely as a vision by which *he* was distinguished, he might be lifted up above his measure. Hezekiah had that in him which he had lost sight of, and which, we are told, caused the Lord to leave him, that it might break out and bring him to a better understanding of his heart. David said, in his prosperity, 'I shall never be moved;' an expression of his satisfaction with earthly goods; an intimation that he had forgotten his dependence, and begun to prefer the gift to the Giver,—the streams to the fountain.

It is difficult to keep under a light head and a self-complacent, self-seeking heart: they will rise to the top of every thing, and it requires a great weight to sink them; and when sunk and shamed, they will perhaps float and be airy beneath the visible surface; they will affect a lightness to conceal the sense of

their condition, and endeavour to gain that place and confidence by impudence and pretension, which they could never acquire by capacity and virtue. They will flatter, not bribe; they will provoke others, by deference and kindness to be sure, to speak praise of them, which, if they had any proper modesty, any just self-estimation, they would blush to hear, and fall to pitying the weakness that could speak it. But not so: they think it discernment, moderate and candid judgment, and fall to praising the speaker, perhaps, with a view to enhance the value and authority of what he has said. There is a great deal of this thing in the world, and it never would, of itself, remind us of greatness or goodness. It is like a doubtful coin; those who handle most of it, doubtless, could not get on well without it; they find their profit in it for a time, but we cannot tell what the end will be. Men, good men, must be greatly good, if they are not quite content, we will not say desirous, to be esteemed more highly than they deserve; but to know they are so esteemed, and to be lifted up by it; to think it their due for no other reason, and to complain and take offence, when any happen to think differently, is a species of hypocrisy, a deception in good earnest, a claiming of excellence which does not belong to them,—a proof that they are losing sight of themselves in their admiratio-

of an image of others' making; that they take peculiar pleasure in such attesting of their merits, and are in danger of preferring it to the 'answer of a good conscience;' that the judgment of men, rather than the judgment of God, is becoming the object of prevalent solicitude; and that the advantage, the credit of virtue, is more looked to, than virtue itself. We need not say that we have here the elements of infidelity.

Let it, however, be especially considered, that these thoughts are not without application to those who have all along been more directly in view,—persons professing to receive the Bible as the word of God, rated as good and useful members of society, and yet acknowledging themselves to be destitute of the life and power of religion. If there be this deceivableness of heart in good men, and this tendency to put themselves off for more than their real value, which none are sharper to perceive or readier to believe than those who pretend to no religion; if they are apt to affect and appropriate as their own, graces and powers which others, whether discerningly or no, accredit to them; we are bound to conclude that this aptitude or proneness to deceive and be deceived, is much greater in those who have no motives, no principles to oppose it, such as humility, penitence, fear of God, or even consistency of character. Such

persons are never rated according to their true character. All observation shows this. Should we note the developments of human character around us; should we reason from what transpires in our own bosoms, we should be convinced that the morality of secular men is a 'vain show;' that it is uncertain, not like the oak that strikes its roots deeper and stronger in its foundation, while its branches spread and aspire to the skies, but like a feather in the air, sure to obey the direction of the wind, to rise and fall with it, yet settling down, down, at every intermission, till it fastens on the earth, and is seen to rise no more. Their morality wants a heart, a principle of life and durability; its motives neither look to, nor proceed from, virtue; but, like 'the fool's eyes,' fix on any thing but God. This accounts for its sad and frequent failures. Such men universally pretend to more than they have. They have principles of evil within them which are kept under, generally, from motives no better than the principles themselves,—motives, certainly, that can never purify the heart, and must indispose and steel it to those that can. Their motives are such as they might have if there were no God: they are not drawn from his word, and, if they have any respect to their accountability to him, it is a respect of fear, not of love; it implies no understanding or approbation of

his character; it is a mere observing, hardly a fearing, of his thunder; it is only nature's involuntary recognition of its Author; a blush of guilt that vanishes with thought; something, like our daily noticing of the presence of the sun, not as any thing we have to do with or think of, except as it serves or incommodes ourselves. There is no God in it; and if it may be said to bow at the shadow or thought of one, it is the god of infidels, not the 'true God who is reconciling the world unto himself by Jesus Christ,' but a god only having such perfections as it suits them to give him; a god who has no concern with rational creatures, but to see that they are not destroyed by any irregular action of his works, who will make them amends for the accidents, losses, and sufferings, which they cannot avoid, and who is complained of, when he crosses their desires, and but spared, when he does them good; a god who is afar off, has no communication with his thinking creatures, and keeps them alive and permits them to multiply, nobody can tell for what.

If we consider what their designs, motives, and affections fasten on, what they look to and centre in, all the faith we discover is, that God was *somehow* concerned in the making of the world, and that they as his creatures do not exactly live without him. Is the desire of wealth, of knowledge, of office, the

ruling passion?—every track leads to this path, every stream runs into this channel; there is no God, no world besides. Here the rock is formed, against which all other currents dash with no power to melt or bear it away. As we look upon the spectacle, we have only the idea that the rational being before us was made to lay up money, to gain some applause and distinction from his fellows, and then die; or that he has lost his proper attraction, pursues no end suitable to himself or to the mind of his Creator, and is to be known *as rational* more by his feet and hands, than by any proof he gives of faith in the word of God, or in the worth of his own immortal nature.

There are others, church-going people too, they are often,—persons neither good nor bad,—harmless creatures that live to enjoy themselves with others,[1] who seem to think that all which is committed to them to do, is to keep up the fashion of the world. From morning till evening, perhaps not from evening till morning, they are watching the pulse of fashion; every symptom of the creature, always sick at best, is studied as if the event of life turned upon it; all her whims are to be imitated, and he who has the start of others in conformity, thinks himself

[1] 'There is a sort of men, whose coining heads
Are mints of all new fashions.'—

made for the time. These airy minds spend their strength in contriving and inventing fresh amusements for themselves and others, in thinking and talking over the incidents and hap-hazards of the day, and in compliments and ados preparatory to the coming prospect. They never talk on serious subjects, except as an act of penance; and he who does so in their presence, runs a chance of being thought a novice, unacquainted with the fashionable world,—a world where such things are not in vogue. While every thing about them, properly considered, is serious, grave as with the impression of momentous truth, they are light and thoughtless; or, if they think at all, it is as people breathe, without knowing it. Should they ever wear out, it will not be by a rational operation, but as a fire does, for want of fuel. They must have full scope and excitement: take these away from them, and they flounce and give signs of constraint, like a fish in shallow water, or wilt inanimately, like a flower cut down in the sun. They love the shades through which the light of truth never breaks; and the fewer thoughts and reflections they can do with, the happier they are. Would you punish them, bring out their temper, or discover their drift,—make them stay with themselves, cross their will, tax them with the reading of a truth-telling book, or with a conversation on

the useful employment of time, and you will discover at once that they have had, and will have, nothing to do with reality; it is a dull and gross affair; a weed in a bed of flowers, a jewel set in iron, so thought, because it is nature shown in the grain, truth shorn of fancy colours, and duty seen as it runs in practice. Their thoughts will not come down to so plain a thing; they live for other and gayer ends; and like the 'flower-shaped psyche,' they fly and light, and light and fly awhile, nobody the better for their presence, or the worse that they are gone. But were thinking creatures made simply to run these rounds? no time for rest, no place for rational entertainment by the way! Were they made to add, to multiply, and subtract with ciphers only? Do they know there is a God?—or knowing there is, do they ever think that they are known to him? Patterns of civility, exact observers of propriety, quick avengers of neglects, do they give him a look or a bow of recognition, as he speaks and passes in his dispensations? 'The ox knoweth his owner,' but these people do not know, do not consider, to whom they belong. Look through all their doings, pleasures, plans, and you will find no sympathy, no pause, no check, caused by divine truth. The affectation of good and reverent qualities proves some consideration for them: but they have not this; they do not, whatever

else they affect, so much as affect a show of devotion As Lot's wife, for looking back and not believing the word of the Lord, was changed into a pillar of salt, so they seem to be *fashioned* into an unnatural structure, 'looking before and after,' steeled against obedience, and bent on idols and self-indulgence. If you take from them the diction and metre of fashion, the thoughts and affections which are bred in worldly fancies and amusements, what do you leave them but empty vessels, mansions whose great inhabitants are kept in chains by usurpers, or presented as strung up in bones, with no heart, no flashes of wit and conscience, shadowing life and hope. They are 'without God in the world;' that is, they are without that influence from him, entering into their affections, joys, plans, hopes, and shaping the conduct, which a belief of his word would impart. They are infidels, no better in condition and prospect, than those who acknowledge they are so; and if they do not know it, it is because they have not taken the trouble to be informed: they want the reflection necessary to conviction.

There can be no living after the manner above described, without ignorance of the word of God, (and to be ignorant of it, when we have it in our hands, is to despise and reject it,) or without some inward, sleepy contrivance of our own, by which we

underrate the blessedness promised to obedience, and hope to escape the punishment threatened against transgression,—and this, again, is infidelity.

Other remarks might be made in reference to this class of individuals, which would lead to the same conclusion. As a general principle, it is worthy to be noted, that there is nothing which true faith prompts us to shun more resolutely than the 'appearance of evil.' The true believer sees nothing more to be dreaded than sin. He has such experience of its bitterness, yea, of his proneness to it, that like 'the prudent man,' he 'foreseeth the evil and hideth himself.' If called to meet it in any of the forms of temptation, he distrusts his strength, and attempts to stand up and go forward, only in the strength of the Lord. Persons, who have none of this experience, are already captives, 'sold under sin.' They have made it their element so long, and their thoughts and feelings flow in its channels so naturally, that nothing seems to be wrong. They do not identify its nature, or separate it from themselves.

If we apply this principle to the devotees of fashion and pleasure, to idlers at large, they will appear to personate infidelity. Sin, considered abstractly, is no evil in their view. They never think that its nature is to obstruct all faith in the word of God,—that low apprehensions of its evil nature tend directly

to produce diminishing impressions of the excellency of the divine law, and of the worth of the privileges and blessings of the gospel. In short, their views make 'the manifold wisdom of God' in the great plan of redemption by the sufferings and death of Christ, foolishness, a downright misconception of their condition and necessities. Entertaining these notions of sin, and affected by them in this manner, no wonder they are not troubled by it, and do not seek deliverance from it. Who will apply for grace when he feels that he has strength enough without it? Who that is whole will seek a physician? Who that is in no danger will fly to a refuge? Who can be penetrated with shame and sorrow for that which he deems no crime, or discredit to himself? Who will learn to depend on a foreign agency to live virtuously, when virtue is his boast, and considered to be his birthright? No persons are in greater danger of falling into these views of sin, and the unbelief they engender, than those to whom we have alluded. They are not, generally, addicted to distinguished iniquities,—things that expose themselves, abash pride, and endanger character. They are strict observers of decency and moderation in sinning. They are only devoted to pleasures and amusements called innocent. They are not pious to be sure, but that is no crime, not a thing to be

repented of or alarmed at. Nothing is more common, say they, and we may safely and without reproach go with the multitude in one respect, if we shun their vices in others. Thus they are confident; no temptations scare them, no danger of being brought near great offences along an inclined road of evil is apprehended, and the only wonder is, that they last so long; that they do not sooner and oftener slide, break through all restraint, and stand out as matured criminals. There is criminality in all they do, for they do nothing well; and not to do well, is to do wrong. Their great error is, that they do not see the sinfulness of sin in their forgetfulness of God; in their not rating and loving objects according to the measure of their worth and excellence. These things show that their nature has run wild from goodness,—that they are estranged from God; and to be estranged from him is the sum and essence of all sin, the very heart of infidelity,—that keeper of the conscience that shuts out the entrance of truth, and cries peace, peace, when all the peace there is, is only that, when pains and fears give way to death.

If we examine the best virtues of unconverted men generally, and particularly of such as we have last described, we shall find new light on the subject. It requires no great insight into human nature, to discover the remnants of a now fallen, but once

glorious, structure; and, what is most remarkable, to see that the remains of this ancient greatness are more apt to be quickened and drawn out by their semblances and qualities, found in creatures, than by the bright and full perfection of them which is in the Creator;—that the heart puts on its most benign face, and sends forth prompt returns of gratitude and love to creatures who have bestowed on us favour and displayed other amiable qualities, while He, whose goodness is so great, so complete, so pervading, that there is none besides it,—the gifts and qualities, with which we are so readily enamoured, being his, and not his creatures', except as they are permitted to pass through their hands to ours,—is unrequited, unheeded, unseen, though hanging out his glory from the heavens, and coming down to us in streams of compassion and love, which have made an ocean on earth that is to overflow and fill it. How strange it is, that all this love, so wonderful in itself, so undeserved, so diffused, that we see it in every beauty, and taste it in every enjoyment,—should be lost on creatures whose love for the gentler and worthier qualities of each other, runs so often into rapture and devotion! How strange that they should be so delighted with streams which have gathered such admixtures of earth, which cast up such 'mire and dirt,' and have such shallows

and falls that we often wreck our hopes in them,—as not to be reminded by them of the great and unmixed fountain whence they have flowed, or of the great ocean, to whose dark and unbottomed depths they will at last settle, as too earthy to rise to its pure and glorious surface! There are many mysteries in human nature, but none greater than this: for while it shows man is so much a creature of sense and so devoid of faith, that objects, to gain his attention and affection, must not only be present to him, but have something of sense and self in them, we are still left to wonder how he could, with such manifestations of divine goodness in him, around him, and for him, have failed to see and adore them, and become so like a brute, as not to think of God, the original of all that is lovely, when thinking of those his qualities which so please and affect him in creatures; and this, though they be so soiled and defaced by sin, that his unmixed fondness for any the most agreeable of them, instead of being an accomplishment, is a sure indication of a mind sunk greatly below the standard allotted to it by the Creator.

Our wonder will be raised higher still, if we consider that our nature, when most corrupt and perverse, is not wholly lost to all sense of gratitude, but may be wrought upon by human kindness, when all

the amazing compassion and love of God fail to affect it; if we consider that the very worst of men who set their faces against the heavens, affronting the mercy and defying the majesty thereof, are sometimes so softened with a sense of singular and undeserved favours, that their hearts swell with grateful sentiments towards their benefactors, and something akin to virtue is kindled up where nothing of the kind was seen before; we might think it incredible, if there was any doubting of what we see and know. When we see such men so ready to acknowledge their obligations to their fellows, and to return service for service; so impatient of being thought ungrateful, when they have any character or interest to promote by it, and sometimes, when they have not; so strongly affected with the goodness of him who has interposed between them and temporal danger or death, and yet so little moved by the love of God in Christ, which has undertaken their rescue from eternal and deserved woes, and not merely their rescue, but their exaltation to fellowship with himself, and to the pleasures for evermore at his right hand,—a love compared with which the greatest love of creatures is as a ray of light to the sun and that ray mixed and darkened, while this is so disinterested and free in the grounds and motives of it, that it is exercised towards those who have neither

merit to invite, nor disposition to receive it; when we see this, and find that this love, so worthy in itself, so incomprehensible in its degree and in the benefits it would confer, is the only love to which they make no returns of thankfulness or regard, we may ascribe as much of it as we please to the hardness and corruption of their hearts, but that will not account for such conduct. Depravity, considered by itself, will not enable us fully to understand it. Depraved, sensual, and perverse as they are, they have something in them that is kindled by human kindness, and why should it not be kindled by the greater 'kindness of God our Saviour?' It is not because it is a *divine kindness;* not that it is less needed—not that it is bestowed in less measure, or at less expense. And if it is because they do not apprehend this kindness, do not *feel* their need of it, do not *see* any thing affecting in the measure and expense of it, this is infidelity; and it grows out of an entire misconception of their own character, and of the character and law of God. It is a total blindness to distant and invisible good and evil. It is a venturing of every thing most important to themselves on an uncertainty, which they would not and could not do, if they had any understanding of the value of the interests at stake. They really see nothing important but the gratifications of sense and

time: still they have the remains of a capacity for something higher. These may be contemplated with profit, if not with admiration. They resemble the motions in the limbs and heart of animals, when the head is severed from the body. They are symptoms of a life that of itself must come to nothing; a life that is solely pouring itself out on the *ground.* But as this is all the life they have, an image of life, and that only of life in death; and as the motions of it are only excited by the creature's kindness, we discover in their best virtues, or rather, in their only breathings and indications of virtue, the evidence of a faithless heart.

The different classes of people brought to our view in this chapter, generally consider themselves very innocent; some, because they are free from great vices, and others, because great vices have blinded their eyes to guilt. But it is observable that the ground of this supposed innocence is the same in all, and lies in mistaken views of the evil nature of sin, and of the gospel plan of delivering them both from its pollution and curse; so that the most virtuous one of them is as much an infidel in this as the most vicious, that he does not believe himself to be totally ruined by sin, totally destitute of any thing acceptable to a holy God, and totally dependent on him for grace to renew and fit the soul for the bliss of

heaven. Their virtues, too, though in some more clearly manifested than in others, are in all the same as to the grounds and objects of them. They are such as love, gratitude, sympathy with the distresses, and patient endurance for the welfare, of others. We see much of these in one way and another, and sometimes very attractive examples of them. But, as has been shown, their aptest, if not their only exercise, is in view of the favours, claims, and virtues of creatures. These display acts of love, gratitude, and self-denial, strongly fastening on and ending in the creatures, while they are in no degree moved by the greater occasions and excitements of these virtues, found in the dispensations and perfections of the Creator. These very virtues then, which are more the distinction of some than of others, yet in some way the boast of all, are, as truly as their vices, the proof of rank infidelity—that mixture of folly and estrangement which seems to say, 'there is no God.'

They all, too, pay a certain homage to virtue—some by their unwillingness to be thought without it; others by their sensibility to manifestations of it in friends and benefactors; and others, far the greater number, by false pretensions to it. We allude to this now as a proof of peculiar depravity, especially in those who have been considered as claiming for

themselves a special exemption from it. Their very claim to virtue, their affectation of it, shows that their nature and interest plead in its behalf. This part of their conduct seems to acknowledge, in some sense, the worth and advantages of Christian virtue. And thus far, at least, it serves to evince that the temptations to sin and irreligion not only do not make their appeal to the reason of man, but are opposed both by his reason and interest. If we allow that men are strongly prone to conceal their vices, and to display virtues, whether they have them or not, there can be no better evidence that immorality and impiety are found to be inexpedient in the present life. It shows that the witnesses against them are thick on every side; that the practice of them is not merely a disadvantage, but a wrong and a violence against reason, as well as a contempt and breach of the will of God. That must be a singular wickedness, a sin-loving sinfulness indeed, that is abashed and reproved at every turn, and still sins on with pain and hazard, without the hope of advantage, and against the strongest pleadings of a better mind. Such persons sin without a gain; and, if they are to be credited, without a love of it too. They sin with acknowledged disadvantage and injury to themselves. Indeed, on their principles, nobody can tell why they sin at all, unless it be as

water runs downhill, because it cannot stop itself, and has a seeking to get as low as it can. They have that in them which rejects the testimony of God concerning his Son, brings his counsel to naught, casts back his gifts at his feet, and thus exalts itself 'above all that is called God.' If they could have faith without reflection, be delivered from misery in their sins, and obtain heaven without a cross; then well and good: they would like to have it so. They are barely (for they seem not to study or calculate much about it) willing to be saved on their own terms, and see no wisdom in any other. Hence their wonderful ingratitude for redemption. Hence the doctrine of Christ is clouded and deprived of its proper influence, by their misconceptions of it and of their own character. Their minds are filled with mean and unworthy thoughts and suspicions of God, which are but the types and shadows of themselves, pointing to those revelations of great depravity, which they are so apt to make on occasions of temptation and affliction.

There are times and events which 'try men's souls,' and bring to light 'the hidden things of darkness.' It seems to be a general law of God's dealings with his rational creatures, to give them pressure enough of some kind, to make them show out what they are. This is perhaps a reason why the

actors in great deceptions and iniquities seem to be so often struck with infatuation and a strange propensity to self-disclosure. But there is nothing unnatural in it. There are always folly and miscalculation in sin: it is the weakest as well as the worst of things; it is as stupid as it is criminal. Still there is, besides this natural tendency of sin, a tendency in the dispensations of God to bring out the real character of men. And none are more apt to disappoint our expectations, (unless indeed we have profited by observation, so as to expect little from them,) than those who, without any pretence or show of piety, make large pretensions to the moral virtues, and have indeed a fair appearance of them. They sometimes, all at once, without any apparent maturing process, develope a capacity for impiety and crime that would shock the hardiest infidel to witness. Hazael, no doubt, had been a faithful servant; he had the confidence of his king, and, if he were not a dissembler, was confident of his own virtue, when he came to consult the prophet, Elisha, concerning the recovery of his master's health. But so great was his capacity for iniquity, that 'the man of God wept' as he looked upon him; and when Hazael inquired for the occasion of his tears, he answered, 'because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel.' And when told the

crimes he would commit—confident that he could not be guilty of such deeds—Hazael replies in that haste which intimates either disgust or resentment, 'But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?' And Elisha answered, 'The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.' Here was the temptation; and, forewarned as he was, what did he do? He returned to his master with a lie in his mouth, the secret abominations of his heart were unloosed, he murdered the helpless king, and 'reigned in his stead.' So it turns out with numbers of this class. But one instance is as good as many, to show that there is no stability, no principle, no nature of goodness in any of them. Should God lay his hand upon the best of them, as he did upon his servant Job, they would disclose their great sinfulness, if not in abandoning themselves to vices and crimes, yet in more direct and expressive manifestations of enmity to him. Should he afflict them with sores, break up their peace, take away their possessions, children, and friends, they would not require a special tempter, they would show, before half the trial was over, that their service, their virtue, had been for reward; they would, not prompted by another, but self-moved, 'curse him to his face;' and, instead of submitting, and. if need were, dying, like a rational

creature returning to God, they would fly from him, and suffer themselves to be taken, as they do the robber to take their money, only when they could resist it no longer.

It is observable that when troubles and crosses do not break the human will and render it submissive to the will of God, they only stir up its resistance to discharge itself in complaints against him. Such complaints always suppose that the sufferings in the case are not deserved, are unjustly inflicted, and altogether inconsistent with the divine wisdom and goodness in the government of the world. It will be seen at once that this view is wholly at variance with any true knowledge of God, his word, or the heart of man, and that it disqualifies for the exercise, as well as disproves the existence, of the lowest degree of faith in either as revealed in the Scriptures. These complaints indeed assume man to be wiser than God, and affect a desire to govern, to be out of his hands, and to be without him, and without hope from him, in the world. Nothing can more clearly express distrust of his word and perfections, or more immoderately exalt the wisdom and merit of man. On the ground of these assumptions, his will is to prevail in every thing; he is to be considered as knowing what is best for him, as entitled to what he has, as needing no correction, and as

wronged by every pain he feels—a pretension in which he swings clear from God and all duty to him; not to mention that it makes him infallible, and God an erring and unauthorized disturber of human affairs. We say not that men ever believe all this, when they stop to reflect; but in the haste of passion and interest their faith may go on at this rate. But whether they be said to believe it or no, they appear sometimes to act and speak it. They act, if not on the faith, on the presumption of it, which is worse; for hastily to presume that respecting God and his dispensations, which is so extravagant and impious that we cannot considerately believe it, is a singular aggravation of guilt.

To entertain an injurious suspicion of another's character, without so much as inquiring whether there be any ground for it, is proof of no ordinary depravity. It indicates a delight in evil surmises, a love of evil for its own sake, an inconsideration for the rights of others, which, under protection from personal harm, would not stop at any injustice. Men may be so prejudiced and depraved, as to be greatly liable to form wrong and injurious conclusions even after much inquiry for the truth. It may also be very difficult to convince them of their error, and still, they may have too much conscience, too much consideration, to adopt such conclusions, without any examina-

tion, or to retain them, without some persuasion of their truth. There are, if we may so say, marks of rationality in their guilt, concessions at least that they hold themselves responsible for what they do and think. But what should be thought of those who never ask whether they are right or wrong; who are wrong chiefly on subjects of the greatest moment to themselves, and most criminally wrong, because subjects of such a nature that a little reflection would be sufficient to set them right? If it argues peculiar depravity in men to take up and credit a report, fatal to the reputation of one who has been long known and spoken of by them as distinguished for his goodness, without concerning themselves to know the truth of it; still, as a good man at best is imperfect and sometimes falls from the just elevation he has gained, it is not so very wonderful, though so very wicked, that they should do this, as that they should presume to impeach the justice and wisdom of God in his dealings with them, without being at all awed by his perfections or their own ignorance and guilt; without indeed so much as inquiring whether there may not be good reasons for what he does—reasons looking after their best welfare and growing out of his perfection:—and this, when in their prosperity, when he allowed them to have their way in every thing, though it were a way

of disservice to him and of destruction to themselves, none were more certain to take occasion to sin from his goodness, or more ready to profess their patience and pleasure to continue in his hands! What has changed their views? What has put to flight their reverence and consideration at once? God has not changed. His goodness is no more tarnished or diminished than the sun's light and greatness, by the clouds that have darkened their prospect. Must they always have a clear sky? Must they be visited only with gentle breezes and heavenly dews? Must there be no winds and storms? Must they be exempt from the general laws which the Creator has established? Must he work a perpetual miracle in their behalf, that nothing may give them pain, and that every thing may go as they would have it? Suppose he should, and should do the mind of all in the same way? Would there be any room for him to have a will of his own? Would any thing but confusion and disorder follow? Should the wishes of others conflict with their own, which must prevail? They, or others, on this plan, must be subjected to disappointments and crosses; and thus no way seems to be left for God to silence their complaints and secure their approbation, but to let them have their pleasure in every thing, and to do his own pleasure with respect to all others. What importance then

do they take to themselves! What ignorance and distrust of God do they betray, in their murmurs against his dispensations! The moment they are tried and shaken a little, they fall off from him, like the dead limbs and leaves of a tree. They have a certain elevation, but there is no life and vigour in it; and, when its earthly props are taken away, it falls to the ground. They are like those people who have great trust and pleasure in their physician, when their health is returning and the prospects of worldly enjoyments are brightening afresh; but no sooner do new pains and doubtful symptoms arise, than they lose all confidence, and vent their impatience in reproaches. The doctor must give them instant relief, or he has no skill; he must be ever at their side, or he is inattentive, though the world beside is dying for want of his assistance.

Here is a mistake which people often make in complaining of God. They appear to think that they are *very special* objects of his attention—that he comes *out of his way* to reach and afflict them. They forget that they are each but one of a world, and that clouds and sunshine are no respecters of persons. They *will* see at once the reason and advantage of his dispensations. They *must* feel the profit; they must have a sight and taste of it, and not be compelled to trust and look for it Like a

child that is put to a task, with the promise of a reward to-morrow, they become impatient and idle, while the reward is out of sight; but only bring it to their eye and keep it there, and they will do and suffer twice as much as was required to obtain it. In affliction they reason like a child whose thoughts are taken up with the smart of a burn, and therefore refuses to be comforted by the fire, forgets its design, and thinks it has no use but to burn: or like a child that has been spoiled by indulgence, they think it proper that every will should bend to theirs, take every cross as a wrong, and resist every invasion with as much sharpness and confidence as if the world were all a nest and they the wasps that made it.

There is something fundamentally wrong in the moral condition of such people. We see nothing of the character of goodness in them, and as little of the reflection and support of faith. Instead of making other things their appendages, they seem to append to and lean on every thing. They are like vessels that are kept from shrinking, or falling to pieces, only by the *air* that fills them. They are given to change, and the reason is or seems to be, that they know not what well enough is, or knowing, cannot let it alone. It will do for children to complain of crosses, and to desire novelties, and we should bear with them, if they have little reason

in either; but grown people ought to conquer their desires, not let their desires conquer them. Knowing the little there is to choose between one and another thing, except so far as it may be more or less turned to our spiritual account, we ought to be diffident of our choices, and at most, to conclude that we should profit little by that which the highest wisdom, tempered with the most condescending goodness, denies to our desires. What is less agreeable to faith and reason, than the conduct of a rational being, discontented with his present condition, and languishing for this and another thing, as if nothing allotted to him were such as it should be, or such as he might safely determine to have it? The kind of computation which we are disposed to make in these matters, is very decisive of our character. Faith is not apt to turn chooser of the bounties of God, but attaches chief value to that which bears the clearest stamp of his will, regarding more the good intent, than the sensible fruition, of the gift. It indulges no large expectation, especially no immoderate craving, of temporal enjoyment, well assured that but little can be lost here at most, and that nothing can be intended to afford us rest, which we must so soon leave and our fondness is so apt to turn to our harm. It makes us afraid to complain that we have so little to enjoy; it rather fills us with wonder that

we have so much. It always looks before it leaps, and has the manhood to bear with present ills, so long as there is promise or hope of their conducting to the best result at last.

How admirable are the reflections and actions prompted by the genuine faith of the Christian, contrasted with those of the complaining, restless spirit of unbelief! When he comes to try a new situation, he expects to find it little better, perhaps worse, than the one he leaves. If things are not right *at home*, in himself, he knows that things *abroad*, out of himself, will not make him happy. He is able, like the bee, to extract sweets from the bitterest flowers, (flower to him every thing that will yield a sweetness,) and to feed, in inclement seasons, on the honey that is in his hive, that is, in himself, through the culture and the treasuring of kind and pious affections. He lets patience have her 'perfect work,' because that is the way for him to be made 'perfect and entire.'[1] 'He inherits the promises through faith and patience.'[2] He 'has need of patience, that, after he has done the will of God,' and suffered according to his will,[3] he may receive the promised reward; for in due time he knows 'he shall reap, if he faint not.'[4] He knows that the final reward is sure—that it will come at last—and that it

[1] Jam. i. 4. [2] Heb. vi. 12. [3] Heb. x. 36. [4] Gal. vi. 9.

is so great that when it comes, it will abundantly recompense all his work, yea, and patience too.[1] He has in the most trying allotments 'the patience of hope,' the sweetness and evenness of a mind at peace with God. How happy then is he that truly confides in God; that has 'his fruit unto holiness,' both 'the hundredfold' in this life, and in the end, 'life everlasting!'[2]

Now, if the task is easier, and the benefit greater, what can excuse our folly and guilt, or rather what can make them greater, if we will not give up ourselves to be ordered by his guidance, and will not submit to the strokes and burdens which he may lay on us? The task is easier, for nothing is harder than to strive against God, and to have all our crosses aggravated and our pains imbittered, by restless, corroding, and despairing appetites and furies. The benefit is greater than if we could by resistance have our own wills, and enjoy the world to the full: for 'God is not unrighteous to forget' our 'labour of love,' and our 'patience of hope,' and will confer on us a great and eternal reward. But in the world there is nothing permanent and durable; and if there were, it would not be suitable to us, because how long soever that might last in itself, yet we could not last to enjoy it. Though our tem-

[1] Heb. x. 37. [2] Rom. vi. 22. Mark x. 30.

poral goods and comforts were not movable, yet we are; though they might stay with us, yet we could not stay with them; and though they should procure many advantages and pleasures for us, yet that would make the pain and loss of parting with them greater, and by attaching us to life here, might cheat us out of life hereafter. It clearly does not suit our best reason to be greatly anxious for distinctions and comforts here; but there is as much true reason as piety in the counsel, to be 'always abounding in the work of the Lord,' and that upon the ground, that 'we *know* our labour is not in vain in the Lord.'[1]

An inordinate love of the world in some shape is a principal source of impatience, murmuring, and unbelief among Christians. Every thing here is so uncertain that, unless we rest upon something more stable, we shall be the subjects of perpetual change. When the world rises in importance to us, that will magnify our disadvantages and losses, and proportionably shut out from our view the objects of faith, and from our hearts the comforts of our interest in them. We are thus borne off upon a dangerous sea, without any certain direction and object, and every wind rocks, and troubles, and alarms us. If we well consider it, we shall learn to set lightly by creatures, that we may not have an ill farewell with

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

them at last; we shall not envy the distinction and happiness of those worldly minds that seem to reap the fruit of their service and toil in the success and glory of their affairs. They find but a show and semblance of the reality which they seek in these things; 'they weary themselves for very vanity;' they fulfil in their experience, and in their end, the inspired declaration, 'man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain.'[1] Sorrow and repentance is the only end to which they will come at last, and the best end to which they can come in time, and the sooner it comes the better for them; 'for the end of those things,' rested in, 'is death.'[2]

It would be unaccountable that the Christian, who has tasted the bitterness of sin, and the sweetness of pardon and hope, who has been under the conduct and in sight of the world to come, should again be found spending his 'money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not,' had we no experience of his infirmities, and his proneness to divide the heart between God and the world. Hence the necessity of his many corrections and sorrows. Hence we discover the great goodness and wisdom of God, in the uncertain continuance and value of all earthly possessions. He

[1] Psal. xxxix. 6. [2] Rom. vi. 21.

kindly corrupts these streams and undermines these foundations, that we may not rest here to our harm. He makes 'the way of the transgressor hard,' and blocks up the 'broad road' of sinners, that he may win them by present difficulty to think of future good, and by the present poverty of their joys, to seek that 'fulness of joy which is in his presence.' He thus sets himself like a sun in our view, serving us by that which we deem disservice, and enlightening us by that which we miscall darkness. If that which most endangers our greatest good is the greatest evil, then prosperity is often a greater evil than adversity, and what is best for us is often that which is most painful, and most nearly slays us to the world.[1] The vapours and clouds which gather in the sky, always leave it clearer and purer. They obscure for a while the lights of heaven, but these soon come out again with a softened and more cheerful effulgence. The ancients were in great fear and imagined evil from the eclipses of the sun, and still the sun was unchanged; it had as much light and glory as ever, as many planets were moved by its attraction, and only the harmless shade of a body that could never shine, except in a lustre not its own, had got between them and the delight of their eyes. So it happens in lesser systems, in our own

[1] James iv. 4

experience. When darkness or tribulation comes on us, we are apt to start and fear, 'as though some strange thing had happened to us.'[1] The comfortable countenance of the 'Light of the world' is perhaps veiled for a little, and we are left, it may be, to be 'partakers,' though slightly, of the darkness that he experienced in the extremity of his suffering for our sakes; but it ill befits us to complain, to despond, to doubt that 'his glory shall be revealed,' and 'that we shall also be glad in it with exceeding joy.'[2] These things should not move us out of our course of duty or stay us in it; but, like the moon when she suffers an eclipse, we should continue on, losing no motion and no order, till we regain that presence of which we are deprived, and which gives us all the glory we have, whether it be for our joy or for the light and comfort of others. We should be too simple to wonder, if we take alarm sometimes where no danger is, and too knowing, though knowing so little, to be confident in deciding against the goodness of measures, the reasons of which are hid in the wisdom of God. Alas! that we should ever in our troubles charge God foolishly, and quickly conclude that all these things are against us. They come not because God is willing to afflict, but to expose our dangers and defeat our foes. They

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 12. [2] Ibid. 13.

would call us off from the world, take away our false dependencies, and make us confess that 'all our springs,' those of comfort, as well as those of strength, are 'in him.'[1] So great is the pride and weakness of nature, that we but deceive ourselves, if we think it safe to have much of the world in our hands. Our glory is to live above it, and to do this is to 'live by faith on the Son of God,' for 'this is our victory over the world, even our faith.' Faith puts down the world, by spreading over it the glory of Christ, the bright shadowing of 'better things to come.' But the world, rising up, fastens on our pride, drives us from a throne of grace, and causes us to come to God, if come we do, with greater thoughts of ourselves than of him, and no wonder we go away without comfort; for 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace only to the humble.'[2] We are thus left to our complaints, without consolation and without freedom, while the thoughts and affections of the truly humble and faithful, escape from the solitude and constraint of earth, like birds released from their cage, and lose themselves in the lustre and expanse of a native heaven. As the shaken tree roots deeper, as the blast that beats down the flame causes it to rise higher, so they, when brought low by adversity, mount upward, and, when

[1] Psal. lxxxvii. 7. [2] James iv. 6.

shaken by the storms, bind themselves closer to the rock they are resting on. They have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and come what will, come sorrow and bereavement, come sickness and death, they are never vanquished. He that is in them is 'greater than all.' Such is the reasoning and the operation of faith. It does not estimate the events of life, according to the suggestions of a worldly policy. Nothing more strongly indicates the fatal prevalence of unbelief, than a restless, complaining spirit. Such a mind can hardly have the persuasion there is a God; much less can it have a due impression of his perfections. It feels all the insecurity and has all the trouble it would, if God had made no promises, and exerted no wisdom and power to bring all things to a just and happy consummation. How vain the resources, how dread the comforts of a faithless mind! and that mind is essentially faithless that cannot find repose in the arms of a universal Providence, and rejoice to feel its care and own its control. Hanging our hopes on the Lord, and with affections deeply, sweetly rooted in his truth and perfections, he will be to the soul in all troubles, as a great shade in a weary land, and as the morning upon the face of nature, both its joy and its glory.

CHAPTER IV.

Moral worth of incidental actions and opinions—Their peculiarity with reference to the objects of faith—Proper estimate of worldly interests—Singularity of religious indecision—Its contrariety to reason and analogy—Casual devotion—Its absurdity—Its action considered as the cause and fruit of infidelity—All true faith considered as necessarily influential in proportion to the value of its object—Prevalent inattention to the Scriptures—Connexion between faith and knowledge—Infidelity of those who give but a casual attention to religion—Their hope—Their conduct contrasted with their faith and caution in business affairs—Their singular inconsistency—The faith and practice of a nominal believer compared with those of a professed infidel—What there is to choose between them—Religious pretenders—Their liability to self-delusion from the facility with which they gain credit.

Actions incidentally and coldly performed, opinions which, like the features of the face, are ours without our volition, and to which we are chiefly partial because they are ours, though ours in a way which we cannot account for, have little worth in them. They are merely accidents of the mind. There is neither faith, nor heart, nor reason in them. Neither are they instinctive, for instinctive actions and desires have a suitable end; but these seem to have no end at all; none, truly, which they aspire to with that consistency which should entitle them to the dignity of being designed. Still the religious

acts and opinions of many seem to be of this character. It is no uncommon thing for persons, without any consciousness of the process, to confound truth and error, reason and fancy; to take the flashes of the animal spirits for the light of evidence; to think they believe things to be true or false, when they only fancy them to be so, and fancy them to be so, only because they would have them so, or, what is easier, because such is the fancy of others. Such persons have an accidental faith and religion—conveniences that never stand in the way of their desires.

But what renders this peculiarity worthy of particular consideration is, that it respects matters which they confess to be of greater importance than any other, and matters too whose nature and excellency must strongly engage the heart which they engage at all, because the heart will love something strongly and can find nothing else that will bear a comparison with them—nothing, indeed, which they do not make a trifle, or at least convert into a mere hint of the good they contain—causing it, whether by its worthlessness or value, to point to themselves, as the greatest and worthiest objects of our desire and search. That from persons so considering them, these objects so transcendent and inviting that they must needs transport whom they engage, should

receive only a casual attention, a respect so much below what they pay to other things that it seems more like an intentional slight, than a conscious observation of them—is a singularity in the practice of rational creatures, which no philosophy could lead us to presume, and no discretion allow us to credit, if we did not see it daily before our eyes.

A just and rational appreciation of these objects does not indeed hinder our paying to worldly advantages a due regard, neither despising nor adoring them; not slighting their use in the present state nor letting them abate our ardour for the more excellent glory and riches of another; not depending on them for distinction and happiness, but looking to them as means of doing good; not lifted up by the influence and respect which they procure, so as to despise others, or fall into the weakness of esteeming ourselves made regal and absolute by them, as petty princes often are, by the cringing and service of minions, of whom it is hardly a degradation to affect to be their creatures, but still, whose importance is shown to better advantage in the event, than that of their masters who take their consequence from it, and are induced thereby to set an unnatural value upon their smiles and lay claim to that homage from equals which could only be their due as the creators of them. If religion did wholly

and arbitrarily withdraw men from the pursuit of worldly interests, it would be strange, as things are, if they did not act counter to it; but, when it only claims to regulate that pursuit and to turn those interests to the best account, making them all subservient to ends which are acknowledged to be unspeakably more important, yet abstracting nothing from the enjoyment of them here; it is passing strange it should set so lightly on their minds, that they scarcely know if there be any such thing, and concern themselves as little to secure it, as if it were but a mere shadow of the good which they so eagerly seek from this troubled and uncertain world. There must be some cause of this, different from any to which it is usually referred. Their conduct with respect to all other objects, bears some analogy to their professed convictions; but this, confessedly the most adorable and worthy object, is contemplated, if contemplated at all, with a kind of irresolution which as properly bespeaks their dread as their desire of it—their desire, as fearing they may need it—their dread, as not relishing its excellence, and as having insulted and forfeited it by a practical preference of other interests which they dare not profess to esteem before it—leaving them in a state of indecision, wherein their thoughts reach not to it, and rest so easily with them, that a mere profes-

sion of regard to it comes in their view to compensate for the want of regard itself.

This singularity of which we are speaking, is often found in the character of men who are so very moral in most respects, that it would seem hardy to deem them irreligious. But, as God has given reason only to man, thus making him a noble and knowing creature, it is very singular that man should employ that reason in all his moral and social actions and duties, and yet only do the acts of God's worship and service with indifferency of mind, or when some great event or calamity rouses him to it; that he should perform his relative duties, his duties to man with such design and constancy, as that his whole life may be compared to a volume written with forecast of the ends it should answer, while the thoughts and acts which signify any recognition of God and his claims, are but the parentheses which might be left out without breaking the sense, and, we might add, without so much as blemishing the morality of the author. Such casual thoughts and devotions do less honour than injure so worthy an object as they aspire to: they do greatly affront the Divine Majesty by denying to him the chief homage of that faculty in the bestowing of which he has chiefly honoured us; they would even degrade him below ourselves, by apportioning to him less care and

respect than are given to his creatures; paltry, costless things that they are, they would take the place of faith and devotion, when they have not so much of the grace of consideration and design, as is expressed in an idle mimickry of them. They indeed evince such indifference to man's most weighty concerns, such misplacing of his affections, as would leave it in doubt, if we knew nothing more of him, whether he be a rational creature or no: for to be able to think of God as a being proper to worship; to be capable of a religious sentiment, of a spiritual advancement and attend no more to it; to trust all which he owns to be most important to casual thoughts, thoughts which he neither bids nor heeds, is such an impertinence, rather such an impersonality of mind, that as in the stare of idiocy, we cannot tell whether there be thought in it, or whether it be a mere animal surprise.

Such absence of reason and consideration in the practice of man in reference to this subject, while in theory he acknowledges its incomparable importance, and while he is lively to the obligation, and thoughtful in the discharge, of his relative duties, is not to be accounted for without the supposition of that darkness and unbelief of mind which shuts out from the soul all communion with God and all sensible realization of his truth. He acts a part so un-

suitable to his nature and interests, that we should consider it, if our views were straight on this subject, proof of the greatest weakness and self-deception, if not of something worse and wilder On matters of astounding moment he now wills; in an instant he wills not; in another he knows not whether he wills or no. He importantly aims at nothing, and to nothing comes. He lives and dies unimproved by the experience of others, and unimproving others by his own. Such indecision, such an end in relation to the affairs of the world, would indicate an abandonment of our proper nature, and whatever we may think of it as affecting the higher concerns of eternity, certain it is that it cannot be the fruit of considering them; and not to consider them, when we admit our high concernment in them, and are summoned to it by so many arguments of invitation and as with the alarm-voice of the spirit within us and of all nature around us, is to despise and reject them as in our slumbers, and to become infidels, if not by the action of our reason, yet by the chance of our indifference.

Such treatment of the claims of religion is the direct effect of infidelity; and this conviction must be theirs who will consider not only what influence the revealed will of God is entitled to have, but what it actually has, on minds that believe it. Men are

universally curious to look into futurity, and to know something of their condition after death; and nothing could be more worthy, or better adapted, to sway their conduct, than a thorough persuasion of the truth of the revelation which God has made on this subject. When they come to this understanding, and see their immortal interests side by side with those of time; when they *feel* that there is but a step between them and the full reality, but an uncertain period, (and that short at longest and unsatisfying at best,) between them and their eternal separation from every thing the heart attaches to here, except what God has approved and set apart for heaven,—they will feel the actuating spirit of the word, and if they do not 'become whole,'[1] will at least be willing to consider and 'do many things.'[2] But, as the case often stands, they come far short of this: they honour the subject only with casual notices; they want, indeed, the sensibility and purpose about it of the judge (have they more merit than he?) who said *within himself*, 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet, because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her; I will do what is right in her case, that I may be rid of her importunity.'[3] Awakened sinners sometimes attempt to procure relief to a troubled conscience on this prin-

[1] John v. 4. [2] Mark vi. 20. [3] Luke xviii. 4, 5.

ciple; they do some proper things as with impatience to have them out of mind; but those now under consideration are not awakened; they are not troubled with their sins, and of consequence do little or nothing to procure peace by good works. They have *good* works to be sure, but, as we have remarked, their works point not to God, but to their credit and influence in the world, to the endowment and happiness of relatives and friends; and not to a preparation of themselves and others for heaven, by the control and subversion of sin in the heart.

All belief concerning matters of importance, especially if matters necessarily affecting us, or affording the means of securing any desirable object, will always have much influence on a sound mind; and this is not more true with respect to any thing than the truths of religion. These truths are also aided in the impression which they are adapted to make, by the conscience of man, and by the necessity of his nature for the instruction and relief which they furnish. Any such credit of them, as men usually give to facts and statements in the history of very distant times and countries, would cause them to take an important place in their thoughts; for it is not necessary that they should love the truth, in order to feel it, any more than it is necessary that they

should love the sun, in order to be apprized of its heat. Our love of an object will, indeed, increase the influence of our faith in it, by disposing us to entertain it in our minds, and by sweetly confirming our experience of it; but there are some objects so immense and glorious that, when we really credit their existence, though we should not be well disposed towards them, they will take hold of us in so many ways that we shall find it difficult to escape from them; and the very effort to do so, may make us more sensible of our trouble, as he would be, who should shut his eyes to rid himself of a pain, or run to get out of the light of day. It is, therefore, evident that such persons, as we have described, do not credit the stupendous truths of the gospel. They *only think* they do. They are not indeed infidels on the ground of reflection and evidence, and perhaps, if they should attempt to be, it would result in convincing them that they are so from the want of it. But it is one thing to have infidelity in the heart, guarding as 'a strong man armed' against the entrance of truth, and another thing to have admitted it there, with such understanding as that we can give a reason of it. They have clearly not done this: still they are not alive to the great and affecting truths of religion; and their conduct, contrasted

with that of those who are, shows that they have come to doubt them by an easier way than that of investigation.

We can have no better proof of this, than their habitual inattention to the record which God has given of his will. This record is as the letting down of heaven to earth, as the breaking out of a sun upon our darkness. It is the very heart of love, the mind of God, conveyed to us as with his own voice in Jesus Christ. It has been the food and joy of his people in every age. Of this we have a striking illustration in the eager desire manifested for the Scriptures at an early period of the reformation in England. "Entire copies of the Bible, when they could only be multiplied by means of amanuenses, were too costly to be within the reach of very many readers; but those who could not procure the 'volume of the Book,' would give a load of hay for a few favourite chapters, and many such scraps were consumed upon the persons of the martyrs at the stake. They would hide the forbidden treasure under the floors of their houses, and put their lives in peril, rather than forego the book they desired; they would sit up all night, their doors being shut for fear of surprise, reading or hearing others read the word of God; they would bury themselves in the woods, and there converse with it in solitude;

they would tend their herds in the fields, and still steal an hour for drinking in the good tidings of great joy:—thus was the angel come down to trouble the water, and there was only wanted some providential crisis to put the nation into it, that it might be made whole."[1] This desire is not confined to times of persecution. It is the outstanding distinction of all the saints who have their record in the Bible, and the mark of all faithful people. They delight in the Scriptures 'after the inner man,' make them their 'meditation all the day,' give heed to them as to 'a light that shineth in a dark place,'[2] 'get understanding through them, and therefore hate every false way.' And if they who profess to credit them, and yet give them only casual thoughts, and, with perhaps the exception of the lessons appointed for Sunday, read them less than other books, and, when reading them, find no life, nor sweetness, nor persuasion in them; if they who take it for granted that they know them, and therefore do not seek to have an understanding in them, would search into them, as into depths that conceal the richest treasures, they would soon find 'a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about them,' and hear 'a voice speaking unto them,' (which now they do not so much as

[1] Blunt's Sketch of the Reformation in England. [2] 1 Pet. i. 19.

fancy they hear,) and saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it;'[1] 'Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.'[2] They would indeed feel that 'the water was troubled' as with life from above, and their drinking of it would be as the putting on of immortality. The Scriptures have an evidence in them which is not seen by glances; they have a fire in them which must be mused upon, before it will begin to burn; like the heavens, they have lights and wonders in them which are not seen by common gazers, and though they may receive them from the report of others to whom they have come as by observation, yet it is as things of which they have no knowledge, and with which they have no means of communication.

Casual thinkers on religious subjects know less of the Scriptures than they suppose. There may be nothing in them which they have not heard or read, and yet scarcely any thing which they have considered. Nothing important, nothing that imports an increase of understanding, was ever acquired in this way. So much wisdom on this subject is taken for granted, that, like the knowledge of ourselves, it is likely to be most defective when it is deemed most complete. But faith and knowledge go 'hand in hand,' and when one is indistinct,

[1] Isa. xxx. 21. [2] John xii. 35.

both are. When we are content with guesses in place of knowledge, our faith at most is but a peradventure; it is not the stay of the mind, but a broken wing, which, while it indicates that we were designed for noble flights, proves that we are disabled for them. If it give a look towards God and duty, it is as the look of 'eyes which see not,' while the secret current of feeling and influence sets all the other way. This must be so, unless we have a faith which prompts us to serve God, because we know him, or to seek him, because we know him not. Thus faith always runs either in or after knowledge, and knowledge turns to a happy experience first, and then to assurance and complete blessedness. Hence to know God is to enjoy him by way of experience, as well as 'to have eternal life'[1] by way of reward. But to know him is first 'to know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent;' for 'no man knoweth who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.'[2] He has spoken and acted out his will in our nature; he is the 'way, the truth, and the life, and to as many as receive him, he gives power to become the sons of God.' To know him, then, is to know God, and know him, too, in a way that is as obliging as it is condescending, and should be as grateful as

[1] John xxii. 3. Comp. Rom. ii. 23. [2] Luke x. 22.

it is honourable to our nature. Truly it is no difficult science which we are to learn, no cold abstraction which we are to study, but the simple truth,—the life coming to us all animated as with our own sympathies,—nothing but an experience which we are to make our own, and that, the experience of the Father's Well-beloved,—blessed in him in all but what he endured for our sakes,—in us blessed with all the sweetening his love can give it, and ending in 'all the fulness of God!' It is this knowledge of God which *natural* men have not; and it is a great aggravation of the guilt of their unbelief and hardness, that it is a knowledge which is proposed to them warm as with the kindliest affection for them, and commended to them as a *tried* experience of their necessities. Were there nothing tender and lively in it, it would not be so strange, though strange it were, that they should be unbelieving. But the truth to be believed is as well adapted, as it is worthy, to affect their hearts; and if they give it only a loose and unstudied entertainment, a forced and outward obedience, it is the best possible proof that they do as little know as believe it. They may have no suspicion that they are ignorant of God. They may have grown up with some vague impressions of his being and attributes, which they dignify with the name of knowledge, but, though the real 'sons of

Eli,' they 'are the sons of Belial, who know not the Lord.'[1] They walk in the vanity of their minds, 'being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.'[2] To this we are taught to ascribe 'the blindness of their hearts,' and the unfruitfulness of their lives. They are indeed *alienated* from God through *ignorance.* This is the great cause of their unbelief and hardiness in transgression; and they must *feel* after him by knowledge, before they can reasonably expect to *find* him by faith. They must become *ignorant* by a persuasion that they are so, before they can become *wise* by an understanding of what wisdom is. They must search the Scriptures if in them they think they have eternal life, and through them come first to the 'break of day.'

After taking a view of the 'dark ages' in which men were corrupted by ignorance, and content with mere glimpses of knowledge, "what," says Dr. Good, "is the upshot of the whole?—the moral that the survey inculcates? Distinctly this; a moral of the utmost moment, and imprinted on every step we have trodden—that ignorance is ever associated with wretchedness and vice, and knowledge with virtue and happiness." This moral is as clearly illustrated in the life of individuals as in

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 12. [2] Eph. iv. 18.

the history of nations—in the experience of a single Christian as in that of the church of Christ. Divine truth, as imbodied and shadowed forth in the Scriptures and in the lives of Christians, is the 'salt of the earth,' the 'light of the world;' and, where it is not known and heeded, corruption and darkness must prevail. The amount of its influence must also depend upon the degree of attention that is given to it. Cold and incurious thoughts will not answer the purpose. There is a 'secret of the Lord' in his word which does not come out of it unsought, like a flash of lightning or a dash of rain from the cloud. It is disclosed to waiting and attentive eyes, not suddenly and fully, but by a way of gradual diffusion which makes it more a part of ourselves, or rather ourselves indeed, than our acquirement—we being made thereby 'partakers of a divine nature.' God does not intend that we shall have the best things, if we will not 'search diligently until we find them.' We are not to pass from poverty to riches, from ignorance to knowledge, from a state of sin to a state of faith and holiness, in a moment, and without an effort. And were we as practical and wise with respect to divine as other things, we should not look for this latter change without great effort, nor should we be deterred by that necessity from applying our mind to it, unless indeed the object

were deemed undeservable in comparison with others. So that it is not the requisite effort that deters us from the pursuit of divine knowledge, but our low appreciation of it—our utter unbelief in regard to the great interest we have in it. Were there no want of faith in this latter sense, we should soon know that, as 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,' so do 'the violent take it by force.'[1] We should not wonder that we are required to do so much, but that so much may be gained by the little that we can do. We should not so easily satisfy ourselves with the acting of religion on holy days, and in an outward compliance with its forms and customs. We should not find it so difficult to call off our thoughts from the world, and to turn them to heaven with designs and desires carrying us there. Our first wonder would be that there is a heaven for us,—our greater wonder, that it should be procured at an expense so great that we cannot tell which is greatest, the love which bore it, or the guilt which made it necessary. Our strongest desire to be there would be that we may 'be for ever with the Lord,' who is such, and could love us so, that our loving him is not so much his will, as our privilege, and not so much his glory, as we would make it ours. Faith indeed would set every thing

[1] Matt. xi. 12.

right in the dispensations and requirements of God, and make religion, not our trouble and hinderance, but our help and delight—the work and end for which we came into the world. It would not suffer us to 'halt between two opinions,' or to be without any opinion at all; to be satisfied with occasional compunctions and partial reformations; to be scared from one indulgence by fear, and tempted from another by interest, and allied to others by inclination; to talk devotion and humility, and yet, without discomposure, to retain pride and to practise self-interest. It is a modest grace, which, while it confides in the promises of God, blushes with the shame, and labours with the distrust, of a wicked and deceitful heart. It is satisfied only with the complete likeness of its object.

How different then is the work of faith from the conduct of those whose character has been under review! Giving to the truths and duties of religion but an outside and casual respect, they live in an incurious, ignorant, and unrelenting condition. They are not sufficiently conversant with them to imbibe any influence from them, nor sufficiently thoughtful of them to have any certain persuasion of their obligation. Persons of this description have various shades of character. In some infidelity is more speculative; in others there seems to be little

speculation about it, and it only shows itself in the pernicious fruits of their lives and manners; but we 'know them all by their fruits.' They are found everywhere in the ranks of those who speak favourably of Christianity, who attend places of worship, and who alike feel themselves insulted and scandalized when they are charged with infidelity; yet nothing is more just. We need not, and they need not, be mistaken. There is no profit in delusion. There is no charity in concealing the truth. Infidelity runs in their speculations, oozes up in their worldly musings, and comes fully out in their drift and habits. The religion of the best of them amounts only to a state of indifference and lukewarmness; but the worst have too much moderation and taste in sinning to 'glory in their shame,' or to 'suffer the sickness of their drunkenness, and yet call it pleasure:' they are not so far gone in iniquity; but with respect to the infidelity of all, we may say what was said, by one[1] of their own number, of the popes of Rome: "No man looks for holiness in the bishops of Rome; those are the best popes who are not extremely wicked." They all have a certain faith, and the chief mischief of their state is, that they seem to think that if they were infidels, they should

[1] Papirius Massonius.—See Jeremy Taylor's Sermon on Growth in Grace.

have no faith at all. This is a great mistake. They would then, as now, believe and not tremble, have convictions, and presumptions, and hopes (all disturbers only) of acquaintance and happiness with God, while wrapt in their own darkness, and loving that darkness well. They must look elsewhere, if they would find a difference between themselves and professed infidels. They are on the same track with them here, and the only difference is, that some have the start of others.

This conclusion will be confirmed by a more particular view of their conduct. If we analyze their hope, it will be found like their worship, a casualty, an incident like our thousand wishes, that come and go we cannot tell why or whither. Such wishes are the drones that feed on our stores, but add nothing to them. They return empty from all their excursions; and so the hope of many not only does not work any good, but hinders them from working any, by imposing on them the belief that it does. It not only lives at their expense, but it reconciles them to remain out of true possession, by keeping in their view the deceitful colours of the prospect. While they recede from it by the visible bias and action of their spirits, its false lights beguile them to think they are drawing near to it. Its *reasoning* is: I shall be happy hereafter in him towards whom

I live in habitual disaffection now. I shall covet then that glorious Presence which now I do not so much as seek, and cannot so much as enjoy. I can be happy in him whom I do not love, and love whom I do not know. I depend upon his favour, but my way of inviting and securing it is to live as without him; to keep myself a stranger to him while he gives me good things to enjoy, and to fly to him at last, when nothing else is left to lean upon. I would remain as I am, but, as I cannot, I am willing, when I must go, to be taken to the bliss of heaven, and, though *that* be not bliss to me now, I can trust to his mercy to make it so then. In this distant region where his communications are obscure and restrained, I see that his goodness abounds, and why should I doubt, when the time for full rewards and disclosures shall come, that it will much more abound; that it will at least then meet the new and peculiar exigencies of creatures for whom now he provides with a father's care, not discriminating between the evil and the good, but embracing them all as children, erring children, yet children still?

Such is their case. They are believers and doers of 'many things.' Their condition differs little from the common state of the unconverted, and that difference, with respect to great numbers, is to their advantage. We are, then, concerned to understand

their faith, and to fix a definite character upon it. This we may be aided to do by considering the correspondence between their faith and practice in worldly business. We see nothing left to chance here, and nothing done, without a designing and adapting of means to ends. They consider the necessities of the country, and the places where their business will be most likely to succeed. They watch the changes in the market, the signs of the times, the agitations and revolutions of governments, the success or failure of those around them, prying into the causes of each, and taking every warning and advantage from them, in the management of their own affairs. In this way they acquire a business-faith, which is based upon reasonable evidence—a business-caution, which shows their profiting by the skill, the rashness, or miscarriage of others—and a business-discernment, which qualifies them to detect good and evil in their signs. And they act out these acquirements; they measure their steps, and consider the effect of each on the event of their affairs; they see quickly where to apply their force, and their zeal, their activity, quickens with every new proof that it will accomplish its design. If they meditate changes in their residence, their employment, or their style of living, they study into the present and future consequences, and endeavour to

adapt their tastes and habits to them; if they are to come into the presence of wise men or princes, they are intent to know how they shall speak, and carry themselves suitably to their character and station, not seeming to be unapprized of their own inferiority, nor affronting the dignity which they wish to propitiate; if a great end is to be gained by extraordinary effort, or the most difficult adventures are believed likely to lead on to fortune or other distinction, they run the greatest hazards, endure the greatest hardships, traverse continents, cross oceans, (asking perhaps the prayers of the church, and so far well doing, yet asking it for a safe conduct in securing temporal advantages, when they seldom think, and might scorn perhaps, to ask the same assistance to secure eternal,) and do all things with a care and sagacity well worthy of rational beings: but how changed, how adverse to this, is the operation of their faith in spiritual concerns! Professing to admit their claim upon their first attention, and their unequalled value to themselves, yet putting them off with occasional thoughts, suffering the remembrance of them to be merged in the stream of other imaginations, or perhaps bidding them begone, in impatience of their restraints; expecting, they know not how soon, to enter into the bright presence of God, angels, and just spirits, and to have their

heaven in a holy communion with them, yet omitting every preparation for it, and not even inquiring how they shall deport themselves before the Majesty on high, or conform to the services and usages of his court; believing that after death the greatest possible change will take place in their residence, their enjoyments, their pursuits, yet not caring to temper and mould themselves to it, but rushing upon that which is of the greatest interest to them, as if they had no part in it, or shutting their eyes to the event, when its shadows come over them and its steady approach cannot be doubted: never, indeed, computing their advances, as well pleased to be receding from, as approaching to, their object; never heeding the port or surprisal of the multitude, but walking with composure after them, though their lights are going out in despair by the way; never acquiring any faith, any caution, any discernment in spiritual things; in nothing manifesting the thought, the engagedness, the resolution with which they pursue the world, but all the capabilities of spiritual life sinking and dying within them (as before the time) without so much as the appearance of a death-struggle or a death-sigh for better things!

If a man should conduct thus in his temporal affairs, all would say he had no faith in the success of his exertions, or did not value the objects to be

gained by them. But should he claim to believe that all worldly advantages were within his reach, and to set the *highest* value upon them, and yet conduct in this manner, we should either set him down for a blockhead, a deranged person, or one who had added to the want of such faith the hypocrisy of professing to have it. And should he set up in some particular business, and give only casual thoughts to it, never seeming to make it the object of pursuit, or to be concerned whether he prospered in it or no, and yet claim credit from others on the ground of such business so attended to, he would not only be distrusted, but, if he persevered in this course, denounced as desiring to conceal his evil condition, and to contract debts which he had not the means or expectation of discharging. With what grace, then, does *he* ask us to give him credit for faith in the gospel, who leaves his whole concern in it 'at loose ends,' and is content to float upon the stream that is bearing him from God, with a force that increases with the distance, and will soon make his return impossible? Why should he not be considered and treated as an infidel? Has he a kind of faith in these things? So has the infidel, but nobody can tell what it is, or what it does, in either case,—unless, indeed, it deters them both, like the faith of failing tradesmen, from looking into their

affairs, lest they should have a fuller view of their ruin. It is not a faith which breeds caution and solicitude, but that improvidence which shuts its eyes and concludes, if conclude it ever does, to take things as they come. Infidelity in both is, as ever, a lazy, dreamy vice; in quiet the most stupid, in rage the most terrible of creatures, but, what is remarkable, blind alike in its rage and mildness. But we see nothing in them of the grace of faith, that birth of intelligence, which, fixing its far-reaching eye on things not discernible by sense, admits now, of a repose that is sweet and lively, and now, of an excitement that is great and burning, yet in order but as reason, and in noise but as light in motion. If we judge of them by their spirit, we see no difference; if by their works, we see both breaking the same ground, and looking for the same increase. Both 'sow to the flesh, and of the flesh reap corruption' daily and visibly. Both are self-confident, self-complacent, indisposed to devotion, and 'trusting in themselves that they are righteous.' Both are disposed to carry this impression as far as they can, and when they make it succeed with men, to take that for an argument that it will pass for a reality with God. Both are the willing dupes of 'an evil heart of unbelief,' and, in spiritual matters, 'grope as if they had no eyes.' Both have

a price all price beyond, put into their hands to get wisdom—the one openly discrediting its value, and thinking himself wise and good enough without it—the other putting upon it all manner of professed respect, and acknowledging his folly and destitution without it, yet burying it in the earth as a talent which he cares not to employ; and, if neither the priest nor the Levite, but 'a certain Samaritan' was 'neighbour to him that fell among thieves,' which of these is the believer? Which treats his Lord with most reverence—he that discredits the gift and his need of it, or he that professes to credit both and does not act conformably to either? he who rejects the offer which he thinks made to him without authority, or he who affects to receive it as of the authority which it claims, and yet never attempts to possess himself of the good it proposes? Which has the most fear of God—he that sins largely as doubting his word, or he that deliberately sins enough as believing it to incur his just displeasure forever? he that sees God as angry with the wicked every day, and is every day sinning, or he that sees him only as indifferent to human actions, and continues to do what he will? Which should we think the better man—he who receives our bounties and favours as thinking they came from us, yet never returns any thanks or discharges any obligation

they lay on him, or he that receives them, as he does the showers of heaven, by the chance or right of his condition, and as little thinks of his duty to us as of the clouds that, without mind, drop down the rain? he that pays us an external respect and deference because he thinks it shall profit him, or he that passes us by as though we were not, and is as regardless of his own interests as of our rights? What, indeed, shall we think of the faith of those who give to the commands of God but an incidental and unstudied obedience? who believe too much, or rather cannot doubt enough to enable them to discard him from their thoughts altogether, and yet are content with thoughts which have no motive to his glory, and do as little restrain and temper them as honour him? who take credit to themselves for acknowledging obligations to which their whole life is as an act of untiring resistance? who entertain him in their loneliness, not as a friend from whom they have nothing to conceal, with confidence and affection, but as a stranger of doubtful appearance, with coldness, with suspicion, and dread? What, indeed, shall we think of those who can contemplate (believingly, as they say) the most affecting and worthy objects 'without any thoughts arising in their hearts?' who can move on, already in the

'shadow of death,' with eyes open on eternity, while the question of their love to God hangs in doubt, and this, though they cannot tell which is the most wonderful, the greatness of his love to them, or the happy and glorious effects and issues of their loving him? who have it in *their faith*, that he is 'a consuming fire' to the wicked, and yet, without any invitation or permission to treat with him in their own persons, venture before him with a plea of personal merit, with a price in their hand, the hire of service, which is to buy them pardon and eternal life,—thus making his wisdom foolishness, and dispensing with the atonement and offices of his Son?—and this, too, when it is another part of *their faith* to depend solely on him; to believe that many who 'in that day cry Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name done many wonderful works?' shall, as at the very entrance of heaven, find destruction bursting upon them from the words, 'I never knew you: depart from me.' You have slighted my blood, my grace, my promises, my infinite compassions, and now come with the offering of your merits in their place. I have wrought out for you a perfect righteousness, and, not accepting it, you have gone about to establish a righteousness of your own. I have borne the punishment of your sins, but you

have not borne my cross, and you can have no part in my joy and glory.

All the analogies of human conduct lead us to infer, and we should not be surprised to find, that deception is sometimes practised in religion. If men can gain any advantage by it, it is not reasonable to suppose that they will abstain from it in this any more than in other cases. If they will do penance, cut and deform their bodies, perform pilgrimages, persecute and put to death 'the saints of the Most High' and think they do him acceptable services, why should it be doubted that they may do much to work out a righteousness of their own, make 'long prayers' and a great show of humility and zeal, by which the same end is to be effected with less expense and less pain to nature, when they have not a particle of the spirit of the Master they affect to serve? All, no doubt, do something in this way; but the wonder is that they do no more; though doing less or more would leave them alike faithless. The omission is only to be accounted for on the ground of their disrelish to spiritual virtues, and of the little profit they derive from the credit of them. Still, a self-righteous, and therefore a faithless spirit, actuates the religion of many. Caring much for the reputation, and something for the reality, of piety, without perhaps intending deception they come by

degrees to claim stoutly the excellence which others, in their charity, presume them to have. No one is disposed to call in question their Christian pretensions; and being without that brokenness of heart and faith in Christ which cause them to fly from themselves for support and direction, they walk in the sight of their own eyes, and take the outside for the inward life of religion. This they can maintain without any modification of their natural desires; and, as it procures for them some peace of conscience, and much confidence and credit with others, no wonder if they trust it, value it, and think it acceptable to God, to whose perfections they are as blind, as to the miseries and plagues of an unsanctified heart.

CHAPTER V.

Error in estimating our own qualities a cause of our misconceiving the divine perfections—Obstacles to correct views of ourselves—Readiness with which men confess the evil of their hearts—Process by which men are reconciled to evil ways—Causes which perpetuate this delusion—Their unobserved operation—Tendency of worldly companions and amusements to foster infidelity—This danger inferred from our mental constitution—Presumption of those who disregard it—Delicacy of religious sentiment—Its easy decay—Peril of virtue and faith where the influence of religion is discouraged—Great changes in moral character occurring without our notice—Blindness to the infidelity consequent upon them—Difficulty of breaking from worldly society—Things implied in our attachment to it—The prospect presented to the mind—Worldliness—Practical atheism—Peculiar dangers of youth—Whether religion is an easy practice—What is essential to make it so—Its nature—Its requisitions agreeable to the truest philosophy.

We have hitherto considered the influence of the depravity of our nature on our judgment and practice, with reference chiefly to the duties which we owe to God. This, too, is the principal object of every part of the present discussion. But whatever leads to such errors, either of opinion or practice, as we have contemplated, must evidently be the cause of great errors in our estimate of our own character. Indeed errors in the faith and practice of religion

always presuppose errors in our judgment of ourselves, if they do not proceed from them. We must rightly understand our own character, or we never can rightly understand the character of God and the wisdom and fitness of his proceedings with us. That, which is most apt to betray us into self-delusion, will be a chief cause of error in the concerns of religion. It is therefore pertinent to our object to consider the influence of our depravity on our *views of ourselves.* The mistakes of this description, which we may be able to detect, will assist us to determine what confidence we should have in the purity and adequacy of our conceptions of the moral perfections of God. The question for our decision will be whether, if erring and partial in our views of our own moral qualities, we shall be likely to be correct and impartial in our estimate of the requirements of the divine law?

A general obstacle to correct views of ourselves, as well as of God, is our self-ignorance; and this is ignorance which we are naturally too indolent to discover, and too self-complacent to suspect, before some glaring evidence of it has been forced upon the mind. Our intimacy with the subject seems to us to suppose knowledge,—and inquiry and solicitude are therefore not entertained; and what is most easy and necessary to be learned remains unknown. For this

reason, our knowledge of subjects rarely presented to the mind, and requiring much investigation to be understood, is often more perfect than our knowledge of those with which we are more familiar, and which may be more easily investigated; and as this ignorance is shameless, because common, and grateful, because it keeps us in favour with ourselves, it is no wonder if we assume the credit, while we are destitute of the life and proper operation, of knowledge. He, whose religion is something better than profaneness, will not find it difficult to believe that he is both good and knowing indeed, if they, whose hearts and heads he studies in the inferences of their conduct, can have countenance for these qualities; and this too, when they show in nothing that they have them not so much as in the extravagance of their pretending to them—adding to their destitution of the qualities so great dulness in the perception of them, that they need but to know them to be convinced that they have them not.

There is one thing with which we may always be familiar, which may be seen in every individual about us as in a glass, which shares in all our cares and affections and runs in every thing we do; and, though there be nothing more important for us to know well, there is yet nothing of which we gene-

rally know so little. It is that *self*, busy and present in every thing,—that strangely anxious, yet more strangely improvident presence which works such wonders on us, and such suspicions in us, which in others flatters us to discern our weakness, and in ourselves flatters us to conceal it; in them praises us barely to hide the envy which dreads our discovery, and in ourselves detects the secret, yet glories in the praise; in them makes our opinion the test of what is fit and noble, while it affects to be indifferent to all opinions but its own, and both in them and us smiling at the parts which others act, but acting the same with scarcely any consciousness of its own doings—itself yet the most engaged and observing of creatures!

Men, whose consciences and understandings are not wholly perverted, feel and will confess the evil of their hearts; but charge it upon them as it operated in a particular case, and they will show by apologies that they do not believe it. No one is disposed to withhold the confession of our general depravity, and many make it rather with an air of triumph than of humiliation, as if there were magnanimity in it, or were no want of virtue where there is no *unusual* absence of it; but attempt to lift the veil which covers their corruptions, and they start back as if an enemy had approached them

without a warning. They will not come to the investigation; and it seems fair to judge that they are conscious of deeds which would be reproved. Their conduct, in this particular, also implies a readiness to hide themselves from their own view, and a capacity to be satisfied with iniquity that is concealed from the view of others—a state, it should be noted, totally inconsistent with just views of sin or holiness. They do not fear the invisible Searcher of hearts, and the confidence of their associates gives them the confidence of virtue. They walk erect in all the expressiveness of conscious worth, when, if their motives and acts were fully known, they would fly in shame from the presence of those who praise and trust them.

The process, by which we become reconciled to evil ways, is gradual and often imperceptible. Actions that are merely doubtful as to their morality, first gain approbation, and the little beginnings of vice are tolerated without alarm. The mind, naturally tender and timorous, is not easily tempted to commit acts of distinguished iniquity. Its moral dread of vice is not overcome by such bold attacks; but it is done by the undermining influence of humbler departures from virtue. These steal their way into our very constitution before we are apprized of our danger, and without a rattle to remind us of their venomous

nature. They are the young vices which we take to our bosoms; the enemy's spies which we entertain not only with our secrets, but with our best provisions; 'the foolish virgins' to whom we are giving the 'oil in our lamps,' without any fear that it will ever fail us. We think we have light enough and to spare. Our small defects are hid in the shade of our greater virtues, and if by the light of truth and conscience they are ever made to appear, like spots upon a planet, they are surrounded with splendour, and, what is satisfactory, are not *visible* to *mortal eyes*. Thus, through the deceitfulness of sin, we are first drawn into its power, and cheated into the belief that all is well because no evils are experienced, we become confident of virtue in the loss of sensibility to guilt, and in the successes of undiscovered crime, are reconciled to ourselves by the continued favour and countenance of the good.

But the process, by which we are beguiled from virtue, and deluded into a sinful complacency with our own character, is not more subtle or unobserved than the operation of the causes which tend to perpetuate the delusion. The best of men are liable to be influenced in their opinions of themselves by the depravity of the heart. Running in the thoughts and affecting the understanding of men, it causes not only many individual errors, but a lax and danger-

ous 'public opinion,' which is apt to be referred to, as authority for what is right and proper. We have stated, and it may be repeated, that we are disposed to think little of imperfections and sins which are supposed to be common to man; and it is not less true that any evil practice, which public opinion sanctions, will lose the appearance of evil as it *respectably* prevails. Who, indeed, is likely to feel remorse or shame for what the world approves? Guilt finds countenance for itself in guilt; and he that lacks beauty or virtue will not wish to conceal himself where neither is esteemed. In this practical reference of our conduct to the judgment of the world, the 'blind lead the blind,' and sustain each other in the way of ruin. Many united will be confident in a bad cause, which no one alone would have courage to defend. Each one finds encouragement for himself in the example of others, and so each is supported, and in his turn supports another.

Few are at all apprized to what extent their opinions are influenced and moulded by the practice of their associates. To one of two societies we must belong, the servants of God, or the servants of satan; the votaries of time, or the votaries of eternity: they are each of them striving for the mastery, and saying, "Come with us." We may now be tender and respectful to the claims of religion, but we have

other sentiments, stronger than these, to which we shall be tempted to yield, if we enter ourselves with those who are devoted to the amusements and interests of time. There is a spice of atheism, a dash of immodesty towards religion in all they do and say, which is the more dangerous, because it is so mild and diffused a thing that it requires more than ordinary watchfulness to detect it, and more than ordinary courage to give it its true character. With them life and death, hope and disappointment are spoken of without advertence to God, and with regard only to physical causes and effects. The motives and the works of piety are referred to principles of selfishness and hopes of gain, such as pervade their own minds in the business of the world. If we hear and consider with attention, we shall find the sentiment breaking out like a restrained fire at every opening, that all men have the same end, and the only difference is, that of many lawful ways to it, some take one, and some, another. The most serious and awful scenes of human existence are commented on as incidents in a world of chance. The sensibility and thoughtfulness, which they awaken in the less confirmed of their number, are contemplated, and perhaps adverted to, as symptoms of weakness and inexperience, to which it is their felicity to be superior. Now, let it be con-

sidered that our religious sentiment is not *naturally* our strongest; that, like other delicacies of the mind and heart, it recoils at first, and then loses its nature when used to ungenial associations, and becomes, if not the conscious, the real subject of an impure conversion; that our strongest tendency is to fix our affections on the world, to break from the restraints of eternity, to adjust our opinions to the standard of our companions, and to make their esteem a great and leading object in our speeches, smiles, and favours—and can it be doubted that here is an active and powerful cause of degeneracy and unbelief? Can we doubt that the result of this combination will be to create in us a necessity for pleasures, and a complacency in pursuits and imaginations, hostile alike to religious consideration and to correct views of personal character, and certain to perpetuate the delusion, if not checked by the intervention of crosses and calamities which shall bring us back to a 'right mind,' and to the 'abundance that is in our Father's house?' We remember one (who seemed to run well in religion) who, falling among the enemies of his Lord, denied him in fear of their displeasure—and another, (who heard the preacher 'gladly, and did many things,') who afterward, (though 'he knew him to be a just man,') 'for his oath's sake,' (made in a glee,) and 'for their sakes who sat with him,' (for he

desired their approbation,) 'commanded his head to be brought in a charger, and given to the damsel,' who had demanded it as the price of the amusement she afforded them. There are slighter, but not dissimilar, acts of denial and crime, to which we are perpetually tempted in the society of men devoid of religion. Their practice, indeed, is but a denial of its claims, but a blow at the destruction of that which they profess to honour as 'just.' We place ourselves where all is against Christianity, and nothing in favour and honour of it; where the irreligious tendencies of our nature are drawn out and applauded; where it requires more than ordinary courage and strength to preserve or even express any concern for the interests of the soul; where we are strongly tempted to be silent about religion, to acquiesce in its banishment, to suppress our convictions, and to pass on to a guilty and cowardly shame of it, when in the CHOSEN presence of those, who, maugre their friendship, would spoil us of hope and salvation, and think they done us no disservice. Think as well as we may of the society of worldly minds, it gives no entertainment to religion, and will not tolerate the serious mention of it. The life and gayety which prevail there would fly at its approach, like birds scattered by the presence of the fowler. There is, if not an instinct, a ready appre-

hension, a guilty shrinking from it, which as well expresses its infrequency as its unwelcomeness there. If we suppose that we can covet such society, and suffer our thoughts to follow its lead, and to repose in its moods, without the peril of our virtue and of our confidence in the truths of religion, we are unacquainted with our nature and the strength of our mind. We may continue in it and be conscious of no change of opinion, relinquish no article of faith, and incur no charge of singular guilt or vainness of purpose; but we shall fall from our estate in a more general and less observable way; we shall lose our susceptibility to spiritual impressions; indistinctness of perception, aversion to prayer, and deadness to praise will come on, and the strength of the hold which religious principle has upon us will be weakened at every point, before we are apprized that we have changed in any. The cause of this change, of this diffusion of infidelity in the mind, should be borne in remembrance. It is the breaking up and merging of the sinner's convictions of the nature of sin, and of the degree of his own sinfulness, which has taken place as the direct effect of habitual converse with that society, where every thing is planned, spoken, and done in disunion from God; where it is no crime to exclude religion from the thoughts, and where selfishness, pride, and all the spiritual

forms of wickedness are treated as innocent, and only the vices and crimes, which impair confidence and reputation, and put in jeopardy 'their own things,' are noted and condemned as sins.

The infidelity, which results from changed views of personal guilt and danger, (and our views in this respect are always changing for the worse when not improving, and, though changing by insensible degrees perhaps, yet greatly changing,) is seldom perceived by the subject of it, and in this lies its deadliest advantage. It is 'a wolf in sheep's clothing,' having indeed all of the dulness, with none of the innocence of that useful animal. It is a *virus* that has been infused without a sting, and works without pain, consuming the health and obscuring the sight. Its process is as insensible as that of age, disabling and bringing us under its power. No speculative opinions are changed, no great truth is formally renounced; still the change is great; it is diffused through the whole man, and when he contemplates it, it awakens no alarm, and is not likely to be seen either in its cause or effect. It is nature upon which only the changes of experience and age have passed, taking something from its susceptibility and power, but nothing from its goodness and faith. Such are the views which men have of the grown corruption of the heart, when it assumes only an even and

natural shape; and, of course, the infidelity which they involve is rarely suspected. They must be convinced that their views of sin have been modified by their associations, that in the unmixed worldliness of their thoughts and affections there is an element of darkness, a growth of death, which mars and defiles their conceptions of truth, before they can understand their true condition or its proper remedy. This is the reason why it is so difficult to persuade them of their infidelity, and why the truth, when presented to their mind, has so little effect. They are not sensible of the character of the change that has been wrought in their estimation of sin and holiness, and retaining still their opinions, something as a tree retains its limbs when life is gone from them, they esteem themselves as good believers as ever.

The truth affects them little, because they do not see their occasion to be affected by it, and, observe, they never will see it, while they continue to view their character as reflected from the conduct of others who approve of them as they are, and act as they do. Such example has the effect of weakening their convictions of sin, of impairing their fear of God, and estranging the mind from the evidences of his truth. This done, they are left exposed to other consequent causes of unbelief: they have esta-

blished their worldly associations and friendships, and consistency requires that they should continue in them; the difficulty of a return to religious consideration is thus greatly increased; the singularity of such a course and the reproachful surprise it might awaken are more strongly apprehended, and they have not the courage to do the duty they would. This is the best view of their case; and it may be very far from comprehending the whole evil and difficulty of it. They have perhaps drank in so great a measure of worldliness, that they would not exchange it for religion, if they could, would not break from the ranks of its neglecters, if there were no obstacle in the way, no sacrifice of esteem and no reproach to be incurred by it. Like the deranged, or the foolish man, they may be struck spell-bound, with the splendour of their prison-walls, and obstinately refuse to come out, when its doors are opened and liberty proclaimed. When this infatuation, this pleasure with worldly bonds, is added to the enhanced difficulties and sacrifices which they must undergo in breaking from them, reason despairs of their recovery. There is, indeed, no hope of it from themselves. Every influence is operating, every motive is drawing, to help them on in the discredit of religion, and to give them repose without it. True, they have yet some distrust of their

safety, but they see nothing singular in their condition, and, as the numbers who rank with them swell on every side, with hearts light and countenances imaging confidence and delight, their fears are allayed. They take courage from observing the unconcern of others; they would tremble to face the danger alone; to be solitary sinners they could not endure; to see all their companions running in the ways of righteousness would cause instant dissatisfaction and alarm; to be marked and set apart in this way, this would make them hate the distinction which now they so much covet, bring down their high looks, imbitter their pleasures, and run every thing, save religion, to dross and littleness. But their strength stands in numbers, (strange that they should not deem it a strength drawing to destruction,) and their boldness (cutting the air in the rear of powerful leaders, no danger near or looked for) like an insect circling a blaze, repelled by the heat, but inferring no danger from the light, is daring because not seeing, and cheerful because not considering—both illustrating and prompting the exclamation, 'if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!'[1]

Enough has been said to evince that neither the mind nor the heart can be clear in an element from

[1] Matt. vi. 2, 3.

which religion is expelled. Next to positive impiety and sensuality, the greatest obstacle to faith is that worldliness which is acquired in the chosen society of those who are living without God. It stupifies the conscience, cools the affections, breeds distaste to serious reflection, accustoms the mind to the absence of religion, and gives scope and nourishment only to the corrupt tendencies of our nature. It is a *world*, in which God is practically allowed to have no part, which is separated from eternity, where all trifles have a dangerous value, and every thing is permitted to drift but what may be gathered up and turned to the advantage and pleasure of a wasting life. And when it is considered what our nature is, what our proneness, under the wisest and best restraints, to self-indulgence and the neglect of spiritual concerns, can it be thought safe for our virtue, to say nothing of our faith, to strike for pleasure and notoriety in such an element of atheism as this? to inure the heart to a fascination that steels it to the impression of danger, to shut God out of the mind, and let nature run, without the guidance of his grace,

> .....'like a river smooth
> Along its *earthy* borders?'

If we can do this safely, we may blot out as superfluous half of the precepts and cautions of the word

of God; our nature is not what it is there described to be, nor what we have seemed to find it in experience; we have been deceived; there is no danger of being corrupted by 'evil communications,' no cross in religion, no self-denial, no crucifixion of the natural man, no 'worldly lusts' to be slain, nothing to be done but to consent to be borne to heaven, or rather, to let our nature carry us there. Alas, that any should indulge in a dream like this; should think themselves proof against 'the wear and tear' of this current; or should esteem religion so little as to enter themselves on this ground, and take their chance for salvation in a race that leads directly from it, and must soon leave it out of sight! This is to turn their back on God, to stop their ears to his calls, to close their eyes to the lights he has set in their path, and all in an easy expectation of getting to heaven at last. That any will do this, while they have a speculative belief in Christianity, and no settled purpose of living and dying without an interest in it, is an instance of wonderful self-deception, a proof that the plague of their hearts has got a deep and unsuspected hold, and that the excellence, the heart, the whole of Christianity but its outside is gone from their creed, and gone, too, through the advances of corrupt nature, and leaving no sense of vacancy and loss behind. We cannot

express the trouble we feel in viewing the prospect before them. Those generous and noble youth, whose loveliest distinction is their sensibility to virtue, and to a Saviour's compassion; who engage us so by their confidence, their warm and unsettled affections, their inexperience of sorrow and the dangers of deception—all beautiful as they are—we see them giving their hearts to the world—we cry, but cannot make them hear—we look on, and see them as trees already in 'yellow leaf;' the angel that was in them has disappeared, gone in all but his visage; a blight has fallen on the religious delicacy of the mind, and,

> "Like the crush'd flower, no time, no art,
> Can make it bloom again."

We see them yet: their hearts beat only for worldly pleasure and admiration; none of their associates feel surprise or attempt to turn them to better things; their simple feelings are acquiring the vigour and hardiness of a worldly maturity, and they are moving on—a wonder to all but those who are going the same way, yet no wonder to themselves—numbers falling into the grave, numbers wasting with disease, numbers bowed down with anguish and disappointment, numbers consuming with envy and pride, numbers finding pleasure ceasing to please, numbers acknowledging that 'all is vanity,' with no heart to

seek for substance, and numbers looking back on a life gone through, and a world tried and emptied, and forward to an eternity just at hand, yet having no heart, no resolution to prepare for it:—we see them no more—but the world is going on as before; their places are filling up, and ceasing to know them, none the better that they have lived, or the sadder that they are gone.[1]

It is difficult to account for the inconsideration with which persons, accustomed to be wary and thoughtful on other subjects, will put in peril their spiritual interests, without supposing a greater degree of unbelief in their mind than they are ready to acknowledge. To say the least, it evinces a degree of insensibility to the claims and perfections of God, a disaffection with his service, a

[1] If we have nothing secure, nothing which will be ours to enjoy forever, 'what shadows we are,' and what shadows do we dote upon! When contemplating this truth, that was a natural reflection of Mrs. Cooper, which we find in her life by Adam Clark. "When I view mankind, their disappointments, miseries, diseases, and wretchedness, and see that each individual has a cup of sorrow to drink; I feel surprised that this world should ever be alluring to my eyes; that it should ever lay siege to my heart with so much success; that the things relative to another world should be so dimly viewed, so lowly prized. Religion, if it be sincere, must be the prevailing disposition of the mind; it must supersede every thing else; it must be a progressive work, and the soul must be preparing for a state of perfect holiness." Can this be done, can we have any religion at all, in a society where all concern for it is looked out of countenance, and only worldliness is indulged?

decided preference of the world to him, which cannot be continued in, without the most fearful hazard of running into infidelity. It is an ordinary concomitant of such a state to have all the better and earlier convictions of the mind unsettled. When common respect and tenderness toward religion is dissipated, truth, once received and felt, will come under suspicion, and be turned off as uncertain. The great realities of a future life will hang in doubtfulness; we shall begin to suspect our need of faith in them, and to look with more boldness and composure to the trial of them without the preparation which the gospel requires. We want no better proof of this than reflection on the operation of our own mind will give us; but, if we should not so readily find it here, we may see it in the multitudes who, in maturity and old age, are living without religion, and dying without concern. This indifference proceeds from a gross perversion of the intellectual powers in reference to spiritual objects, which has its origin in the qualities of the heart. They did not anticipate this result, —they could not have been satisfied with any rational prospect of it,—but now, that they are the subjects of it, they see nothing strange or alarming in it.

These considerations show what the peculiar dangers of youth are, in associations which withdraw their attention from religion and put them upon

satisfactions foreign to it. There is death in the enchantment of this circle. The leaven of the Pharisees—formality in religion, and distaste to spiritual duties—will spread through all the faculties of their soul, not leaving, ultimately, so much as a lukewarmness for God.

We have sometimes thought that religion is not a little dishonoured, and they not a little deceived, by well meaning representations of it as an easy practice. Its yoke may indeed be easy, and its burden light, but it is only love to Christ and deadness to the world that can make it so. There is no such thing as a religious practice without a conflict with ourselves,—a sacrifice of our devotion to the amusements and pursuits of the world; and, if this be deemed a great hardship, it proves too clearly that the heart is not yet broken in penitence, nor kindled into reciprocal flames by the love of Christ. It is only poising between the world and God, proposing conditions to him, not accepting of his, and indulging thoughts as little worthy of the excellency of his service, as of the greatness of the hopes that are entertained from it. To set out in religion with this mind is not to follow Christ, but to bargain with him for the enjoyment of the world; to dictate on what terms we will be saved, and to pledge to ourselves his acquiescence in them; to presume on

his forbearance, and to confide in his mercy and complacency towards us, while we refuse to separate from the world and to bear his cross. It is a species of self-indulgence that will serve him only so far as he will let us do it in our own way. How much religion persons of this humour would have, or how much practical consideration of Christ's benefits and counsels they evince, it is hard to say. It is wonderful that they should pretend to any; and indeed they pretend to so little, and so little evince, that one is in doubt whether it is their pleasure to have the credit of any. Religion, were it as accommodating to our natural desires as their practice shows it to be, would be little better, as a restraint upon the corruption of our nature, than a warrant for its indulgence in all the ways of preferring the creature to the Creator. Our Saviour did not mistake the truth on this subject when he told 'a certain ruler,' who had kept so many of his commandments, that he lacked one thing, (a lack, let it be observed, which was necessary to render any part of his service acceptable,) must sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and *so come and follow him.* This is a reasonable demand, not only that his service is more advantageous and honourable to us than any thing else, that he has a right to require of us what he will, that he requires an easy service compared

with what he has done for us, but also that it is necessary to any real transformation of our nature that we have a universal preference of spiritual to temporal things,—a readiness to give up all for Christ. Nothing short of this can be a proof of supreme love to him; and to barter with him, for a less measure of regard than this, is to rank him, in desirableness as well as loveliness, below his creatures, and to turn him off with the name of our devotion, while we give its heart and joy to the world. Such a habitude of mind precludes all advancement in holiness, and favours only the growth of the natural and unsanctified man. The supposition, that we can advance in love to God and retain at the same time 'all our creature fondnesses,' is opposed to all the laws of our moral nature, and would, moreover, place religion out of the sphere of all analogy. "All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving. And shall man alone stoop? Shall his pursuits and desires, the reflections of his inward life, be like the reflected image of a tree on the edge of a pool, that grows downward, and seeks a mock heaven in the unstable element beneath it?"[1] Strange that any should think to retain, with a religious practice, that 'friendship' (not to say devotion) 'of the world,' which is styled

[1] Aids to Reflection, p. 105. 2d English edition.

'enmity with God!' Stranger still that they should do this, after the formality of a religious profession which turns all eyes to them as 'lights in the world,'[1] and which, if it avail any thing for good in their experience, does justify those remarkable words, 'ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord,'[2] and that most reasonable deduction,—therefore 'walk as children of light, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness!'[3] This subject is so clear in itself, and evidence so glaring bursts upon it from every page of inspiration and every day of human experience, that we have no fear of intimating that all must be of the same mind upon it, except those who are so little convinced of the deep repugnance of their nature to spiritual things, so worldly secure, and so strongly bent on gratifications foreign to religion, that they neither know its difficulties or its comforts, have no experience of those "cheering, warming beams" that light off the divine countenance, and are thinking to keep God satisfied with a little devotion now, and to give him a full measure when age or exhaustion shall incapacitate them for

[1] Phil. ii. 15. [2] Eph. v. 8—11.

[3] If a man is not rising upward to be an angel, depend upon it, he is sinking downward to be a devil. He cannot stop at the beast. The most savage of men are not beasts; they are worse, a great deal worse.—*Coleridge's Table Talk*, vol. ii. p. 132.

pleasure in other things. There is no religion in all this—clearly none. It is worse than indifference to it—a deliberate postponement of its claims—a discrediting of it, whether intentionally or no, and that, in the house of friends. This is no exaggeration;

> 'There's nothing left to fancy's guess,
> You see that all is barrenness.'

Not a vestige of faith appears in a mind that is desolate and impatient without gratifications which indispose it to devotion. He pays but a sorry compliment to religion, who would obtain it at so cheap a rate—at no sacrifice of worldly vanities and hopes. The heart, that strongly desires, or can easily persuade itself to take, the liberty of this indulgence, cannot stand the test of truth. It is already estranged from the life of God; it finds no access to him in prayer; its enjoyment is not in him, and the course it craves leads from him. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also; and where the heart is, there also will be our delight. If it be imagined that we can be preparing for heaven, while obeying our natural fondness for things here, turning our thoughts and affections in another direction, drifting by the force of cherished habit from God, and only looking back to him in duty when under the lashes of guilt, it is the grossest self-deception. We are going from the object, and it is vain to

expect that it will overtake us. Religion is a 'fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,'[1] a 'walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost;'[2] and how are these to be maintained without a congenial, habitual thoughtfulness, without denying ourselves, and resisting 'the course of this world?'[3] If we will decline a practice so reasonable, as well as scriptural, we must indeed have small thoughts of the objects to be gained by it; if we would carry with us into this fellowship the dead weights of the world, we may be sure that we are dallying and counselling with 'an evil heart of unbelief.' And its power to deceive, and draw us to destruction, will increase with every victory it gains over us. We may not trust it; its venom, its art, invokes a strong resistance.

"The serpent of the field, by art
And spells, is won from harming;
But that which coils around the heart,
O who hath power of charming?"

Our hearts are not like the hearts of others, nor is religion the great thing the Bible makes it, if we can safely presume to face the 'appearance of evil,' and leave our interest in it unguarded.

[1] John i. 3. [2] Acts ix. 31. [3] Eph. ii. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Want of self-knowledge a cause of error in religion—Self-love—Examples of its deceptive operation—Its opposition to correct views of truth—Perils of the state to which it carries the mind—Difficulty of understanding this state, and of escaping from it—Errors that grow out of it—Its incompatibility with moral improvement—Two weighty inferences—Sense of guilt always slight in habitual sins—Great sins rendered sinless in our eyes by a continuance in them—Secret sins—The peculiar danger of them—Their effect on the moral perceptions—The false security and infidelity which insensibly spring from them—The folly of deciding on our character from the opinion of others—Deceptive appearances—Prayer of a Roman worshipper—Great inconsistencies in practice—Instruction drawn from the conduct of the thief and the robber—The moral decency of their example compared with that of others—Effect of sinning on the judgment—Errors in one respect leading to error in all others—Reflections.

HAVING considered the proneness of men to determine the good or evil of their actions by reference to the conduct of others, and the dangerous results which follow from it, we see, more and more, the deceitfulness of the heart, and the great importance of knowing ourselves, if we would know the causes of our unbelief and error in regard to divine truth. The progress of infidelity in every mind keeps pace with the increase of distaste to spiritual things. When we lose our delight in an object of faith, it is gone from us, and we see no more

its beauties—like as an object of vision is gone with all its colours, when we see it no longer. This is especially likely to be the result, when the truths to be credited are not only distasteful, but require the renunciation of objects and pursuits to which the heart has become strongly wedded. It is not to be expected that in this condition we shall see things as they are, if indeed we credit their existence; and, not seeing them as they are, it is impossible that our faith in them, be it more or less, should be according to truth, or have any suitable influence.

We are all liable to have our judgment swayed by interest, prejudice, or passion; but it is very difficult to make any one see this in his own case. This truth however is universally acknowledged; and this, taken in connexion with the difficulty of seeing it in our own practice, shows, clearly, not that we are exceptions to the rule,—that none will allow but ourselves—but that the powers of the intellect—the reason, the understanding—are susceptible of the greatest influence, and the grossest perversion from the qualities of the heart.

Self-love, in some of the forms of its manifestation, sways every man's opinions and actions, to a degree which he can scarcely credit. There are eminent instances of this which glare in every body's eyes; but it is not so important to contem-

plate these, as the more general and less observable processes of it which may be seen in all. We do not here speak of men, who are unusually depraved, but of those simply, who lay many restraints on their evil propensities, and are in high esteem for general probity. And how various and blinding are the operations of this principle in them! He, who is, perhaps, never censured for any delinquency, guided by its specious influence, looks upon others to find his advantage over them. He compares himself with the worst, and loses sight of his own defects in the greatness of theirs, as a lesser light seems put out by a greater. Another lives on the applause and cordiality of his neighbours, finding in their friendship the evidence of virtues which he does not possess. He hears their testimony to the graces of his amiable, upright, and honourable character, and it falls like the music of paradise upon his ear, charming him into delusion, and into favour with faults which he had before condemned. Another is extolled for a deed of folly or wickedness, by the unreflecting multitude, from whom he derives his importance, and for this reason alone, he boasts of it as *his deed*, and thinks it a great virtue. Another, when he is convicted of injustice or vice, invents palliations, complains of persecution, and is readily persuaded, by the sympathy and forbearance of the credulous and the kind,

that his defences are reasonable. Another, when he has offended you, may confess his fault, and if you are ready to forgive and approve, he may be so well pleased with the virtue of his confession that he will think better of himself than he did before he had offended, and this, when, if he had not feared the loss of your favour, he would not have confessed or felt any sorrow for his offence. Whether the object be himself, or one *affecting* himself, no man under the reigning influence of this principle sees *the* truth, the whole truth; he has not light enough for that. He sees things to a great extent as he wishes to see them; and he never wishes to see them as crossing and opposing himself. We need not say what havoc, what base transformations and images of the truth self-love will be likely to cause, when we come to estimate the claims of Christianity, which proposes, as a chief thing, to undo the nature, to take down the pride and sufficiency of man.

The influence of an inordinate self-love, in reconciling us to our own evil ways, may be variously illustrated. That there is much dishonesty even among men who are accounted respectable, and that there is ground in our nature for apprehending it, is evident from the laws and guards that are raised against it: indeed this truth is admitted by all. It is also admitted that much dishonesty is practised

which is never exposed, and cannot be made the subject of legal investigation; but look for the authors of it, and you will not find a man of this class who thinks himself practically dishonest, or believes a report which declares him to be unworthy of confidence. Their cherished impression is that they are not justly liable to this charge, whereas, if another had acted precisely as they have done, they could have no trust in his principles. Tell a man of the opportunities of doing good which he has neglected, and if he has ever felt an emotion of kindness, or designed a virtuous action, he will refer to these for consolation, and perhaps view himself not the less virtuous for not having done what he has delayed only that he might do it more seasonably; and whoever has done more, if more fortunate, has not, he fancies, designed more or wished better.[1] He, who is criminally selfish in all his ways, often says much of the selfishness of the human heart, sees not in himself what he complains of in others, reasons plausibly on the arts employed by many (himself employing the same) to appear benevolent and secure esteem, and concludes, if the methods of promoting our interests are diverse, our motives in all are single, and thus imperceptibly finds himself to be good

[1] So true is it, as Shakspeare says, that "our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues."

in finding that others are bad. The avaricious man, whose storehouses are full, can hardly believe it his duty to give to the poor: he has acquired his wealth by industry and economy, (virtues these!) and can therefore see no reason why he should bestow it upon those who, by the neglect of the same means, have become poor. He considers that every man who lives in indolence, does it with the prospect of poverty before his eyes, and must therefore have preferred the inconveniences of want to the pains of industry; and if he has learned too late the folly of his choice, let him remember that, as a recompense for the evils of his present state, he has already had a season of ease and pleasure. He thus ascribes all his success to himself, (no divine favour in it all,) leaves the unavoidable losses which sometimes reduce men to want wholly out of the account, and takes only that view which is adapted to quiet the apprehensions and secure the possessions of avarice. He, who in the heat of passion has done you an injury, may be disposed, after reflection, to make you satisfaction; but should he now be told that you merited the treatment you received, and ought to atone for your own offences, he will change his mind, and settle into a soothing quietude, considering his remorse both as the result of weakness and as evidence of his disposition to do right. Alexan-

der, when he had in a fit of rage slain one of his most approved friends and captains, sunk into deep remorse, and became inconsolable at the recollection of the horrid deed; but, when a philosopher appeared in his presence to console him, and told him he was made to rule, and was not accountable for his actions, his grief was alleviated, and he became more haughty and unjust.[1] He was relieved by the authority of philosophy appealing to his vanity. Thousands, too, relieve themselves from remorse by referring their sins to the propensities and infirmities of nature. Hence they have an apology for the worst vices and crimes. Their greatest offences are regarded either as misfortunes or weaknesses—as misfortunes, when they are made to suffer for them—as weaknesses, when they find them wasteful and unsatisfying. Whether it be satiety and disgust, or reproach and suffering, which they experience, it is not the pollution or guilt of sin which fixes the attention: no; they are not humbled;—they think themselves neglected, wronged, oppressed, and are perhaps ready to complain of God as unequal in his ways towards them. Examples of the operation of this principle in perverting the judgment might easily be multiplied; but in those now presented, it may be clearly seen

[1] Plutarch's Life of Alexander.

with what false, yet plausible arguments men justify in themselves what they condemn in others, and with what avidity they listen to any thing that lulls their remorse, or flatters their vanity.

A mere continuance in this state is enough to confirm and increase all its evils. The habit of viewing things through this medium, and of measuring them by ourselves, is greatly to be dreaded. It is not likely to alarm, but works swiftly and silently, like a disease that is unknown, yet fatally pervading every part of the system. It eats away all the better sentiments of the heart, and sullies all the perfections of mind. We may not be aware of this, but the danger is not less, but greater, that it will master us. We see, especially in the unobservable processes of our depravity, (unobservable, not by others, but by ourselves, because it has insensibly taken from us the power of discriminating them,) our necessity for a light superior to nature, which shall overcome and extinguish our deceitful glimmerings—just that, indeed, which the Bible proposes, as that is just what all accurate inspection of our nature shows it to be, not an arbitrary appointment, but a provision replete with the clearest understanding of our frame, and the clearest foresight of its fitness to the ends it was designed to secure. Nothing can be more irrational than to trust the natural

goodness of our hearts, and, if we would but judge ourselves as we judge others, we should be wary of this danger: the fact that we are not generally so, only makes the danger greater, and proves that we are victims to self-delusion, not that our hearts are better. It shows that, how drossy soever our natures are growing, we see not 'how the most fine gold has become changed.' The process is diffusive and easy, running through all the faculties and powers of the moral man,—blinding those it does not kill. To love ourselves, to seek only 'our own things,' is to obey nature, and nature in her lowest ends. But it is a practice so common, so agreeable, that we question if the morality of it is often doubted. It will however awaken the deepest solicitude in a considerate mind to know that it precludes all moral improvement, and bears the soul downward, gently perhaps, yet with the weight of a mountain, as ascertained when the heart makes a due resistance. It is a setting up of ourselves in the place of God; not an attaining to ourselves, but a falling below this measure, and finding our level, like water in a storm, in the lowest places of the earth. It nurtures and matures in us that iron selfishness, which is the common blind and distinction of manhood and age.[1]

[1] If our nature be duly considered in this light, it will be clear, that it must depreciate with age, unless that tendency be counteracted by

Persons, who have gone this length, never think that any 'strange thing' has happened to them, and indeed the thing is not so strange, as great: it is a natural growth of the heart, and has so completely rooted out all other qualities, and wrought so great a disrelish for them, that it is rather the heart itself than a quality of it; and no wonder it should awaken no surprise or apprehension. The creature, that is all tiger, never fears that dread totality when seen only in himself. The tempers and designs, which such men guard against in others, in themselves appear harmless as the breathings of life within them. Their life is bound up in the world, their heart contempered and concorporate with sensible things, and all their pretences of respect to the unseen realities of eternity are but as the unreal images that gather in the view of a disordered eye, the faintest notions of what they neither heartily believe nor desire. If with the pretence of public spirit, they overstep the usual bounds of self-interest, it is to catch an opportunity of serving themselves on a larger scale—munificent of beams which draw all eyes to them.

the agency of the Holy Spirit. This feature of the Christian religion is that, without which no renovation of the heart can be conceived as possible. Without divine illumination man can neither know nor improve himself; and, disregarding this truth, his course, as shown above, will be downward, though his progress may not be perceived by himself.

They stand at a perpetual gaze, joying or hoping to see some favourable turn in their affairs, and ready to grasp at the sum of earthly good, not from any sense of duty to God or man, but as if struck with a desire to lose themselves in their own abundance. Every fresh success puts new life and soul into them; but reduce them to despair of worldly emolument, and the most inviting and charming descriptions of heavenly rest have no reviving power; their hearts languish and die, as if the principle of life had already gone from them.

It is, therefore, impossible that any one in this state should have correct views of himself, or be able to see the beauty and excellence of divine things. But it should be remembered, that it is a state to which our nature is fast carrying us, which is itself little other than the growth of nature, and which nothing can hinder us from entering, tending to it as we do, but the counteraction of love to God. Without this the heart will inevitably fasten on lower objects, and have a selfish growth. It will have a devotion, if not to God, to itself, through the love of the world. This tendency alone is sufficient ground for distrusting the justness of our conceptions of moral qualities whether in ourselves or others.

It shows also that great danger to integrity of mind must arise from the indulgence of an undue self-esti-

mation. No one has any remorse for this, nor do we expect to make any proper impression of its evil. When we speak of undue self-estimation we mean, not those gross exhibitions of it, which make it the singularity of an individual, but any degree of it, which affects the judgment. In this degree it is perhaps universal; and it will, if not steadily resisted, gain complete ascendency. Where there is much self-control and strength of mind, there may be no offensive disclosures of it, nothing amounting to weakness; but its operation, though stern and manly, may not be less vital or less influential. The prevalence of this vice (if vice that may be called which is not so esteemed) is greater than some suppose—so various are the modes of its manifestation, and so opposite the ways in which it accomplishes its end.[1] We may not be aware of any danger from it

[1] It may be thought that knowledge on this subject can only breed distrust; but not so—that is but an abuse of it. We cannot shut our eyes to the truth, if we would,—and should not, if we could. Ignorance one of another is more likely to awaken suspicion, and to chill the affections through fear of injustice and hypocrisy in others. No trust, no affection, that is not based upon a due appreciation of our nature,—is suitable to us as rational creatures. It has been well said, "Unless the companions of our lives are absolutely unworthy of our love, or ourselves are incapable of pure and generous emotions, we shall love them with more vivacity, and with more steadiness, when the depth of their faults has been sounded, than we could while ignorance (mother of jealousy and fear) stood in the way between heart and heart."*

* Saturday Evening, p. 213.

to ourselves—we may think *we* are superior to it—but we must believe others are under its power, and shall not be able to persuade them that we are not. The evil is thus, by its own action, concealed from us; but, like the poison that lies dormant in the system, it is not dead—it will do its work if not counteracted. The marble feels not the operation of the chisel, though it yields to it; and the secular man feels not the workings of his depravity, though he yields to them,—and yielding he is often when he least knows it. The heart cannot be well known without habitual attention to its secret and changing motions, nor then, without the aid of light from above. It is a 'mystery of iniquity,' and the startling truth is, that the more complacency we indulge with regard to it, the more secure we feel, and the deeper become its deceptions. The longer we seek for reasons to justify ourselves in doubtful practice, (practice that but harms us in way of self-indulgence,) the more easily will they be formed, and the less evidence shall we require to prove us safe and right. Borne on by the downward tendencies of nature, and diverted from the consideration of our duty and destiny, by the glare of objects that forever assail the senses and occupy the affections, we easily and remorselessly settle into ignorance of our hearts, and into the practice of

immoralities which an overgrown estimation of ourselves will not permit us to fear or condemn.

Man is always growing morally better or worse, and worse he is *surely* growing, without much care and study to become better; and if it be a care and study not heeding the counsel, nor depending on the grace of God, little will be done. The extremes, the temporal hazards, of iniquity, may be shunned; the corruption of nature may run in the forms of a severe morality, but in the end nothing will be found at the bottom but self-importance; it will be seen that he has only 'brought forth fruit unto himself;'[1] and the very shunning of vices and the practice of unusual virtues, so called, may have contributed to this his natural growth. What then, without the most industrious care, must be his progress? The influence of his selfish passions increases with his wants, and sensibility cools with the advance of age. Conscience, once tender and quick to do her office, becomes dilatory. The indulgence of evil desires, once attended with remorse, is now attended with pleasure. Duties, once considered duties and never neglected without pain, now seem hardly to be duties, and are omitted without any compunction or care that they are so. Acts of overreaching injustice, or of withholding avarice, have been repeated

[1] Hos. x. 1.

till they appear to be right. Such is the process of time and habit in undoing our *natural goodness*, or rather that which we fancy so, but which is so, only as bespeaking our high descent, as reaching after perfection, and helping us to attain thereto, when not obstructed by adverse desires and pursuits.[1]

If the tendencies and deceptions of self-love are such as we have disclosed,—if, as observation

[1] We do not mean here simply what Coleridge somewhere, we think in his Friend, expresses, though that may hint its action. We pretend not to quote his exact words—'Conscience, as it is, is like the moon to us, which, with all its massy shadows and deceptive gleams, still lights us on our way, poor travellers as we are. With all its spots and changes and eclipses, with all its vain halos and bedimming vapours, it still reflects the light that is to rise on us in eternity, and which even now is rising.' We mean more a natural seeking after an undefined but suitable good, which is thus graphically described:—"For man doth not rest satisfied either with fruition of that wherewith his life is preserved, or with performance of such actions as advance him most deservedly in estimation; but doth further covet, yea, oftentimes manifestly pursue, with great earnestness, that which cannot stand him in any stead for vital use; that which exceedeth the reach of sense, somewhat divine and heavenly, which, with hidden exultation, he rather surmiseth than conceiveth; somewhat he seeketh, and what that is directly he knoweth not, yet very intentive desire thereof doth so incite him that all other known desires and delights give place to this but only suspected desire."* Something of a presentiment like this, in different degrees of strength, has distinguished man in every age of the world. It is nature (ill working at best) giving signs of her loss, and of her necessity for light and strength from above. When full light comes in, and the way to the object is made clear, strange that interest in it should often flag!

* Hooker's Church Polity, Book I.

teaches, the sense of guilt is abated by the frequent repetition of sinful actions,—two most weighty and alarming conclusions follow, namely, that in our habitual sins the sense of guilt will always be weak, and often entirely lost, and also, that our sins may possess much enormity, and the sense of guilt be slight, and our ways be truly evil, and yet be rendered clean in our own eyes by a continuance in them: thus confirming the inspired aphorism, 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.'[1] Things, once clearly wrong and strongly disapproved, change in his mould, and become

'Like things enskyed and sainted.'

As any one of the passions may possess its object with beauty and virtue, or with loathsomeness and deformity, according as the nature of the passion may be, and these qualities have all the influence of realities with us, though none of them properly belong to the object; so our self-admiration makes us see unreal virtues, and blinds us to real vices, in ourselves. Through the whole range of practice it runs with

"Power to cheat the eye with blear illusion
And give it false presentments."

It conceals from us the harm and guilt of sins to which we are attached, and which a loving practice

[1] Prov. xvi. 2.

would have us (as innocents) retain. Thus by sinning much, or by sinning habitually, we come, sometimes, to think ourselves hardly to be sinners. How should these inferences startle the confidence we have had in our own goodness, drive us to close and unremitted self-examination, and awaken in us the fearful and imploring cry, 'Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O, cleanse thou me from secret faults, and keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins!' It is truly a weighty thing to live in our nature, with a responsible mind. Cast upon an ocean, on which no man ever walked safely except by faith, we disregard all experience, and attempt to walk in the sight of our own eyes. While we are in ease and unconcern, the delusion that blinds us, the weights that sink us, and the reckoning that awaits us, are accumulating. Our movement, though unheeded, is sure and uninterrupted to the bar of God, and the account, to be settled there by most of us, will be composed of habitual sins,—sins, possibly, which had not depreciated us in the estimation of men,—sins, wonderfully, and, alas! which we had accounted sinless, and for which, therefore, we did not expect to answer. O! there is something fearful in living with a slight and inefficient sense of the evil of sin,—something deadly in the quiet which it brings! They are *small* sins—sins that are without reproach—which chiefly

work the ruin of the soul; and yet, that ruin how great, and how strangely small, in our account, the evil that can affect it! Here lies our danger: in a state 'of ill knowledge and self-conceit,' the chances are, that we shall cherish many sins as harmless,—that if we have not come to this pass now, our practice will soon carry us there. That felicitation of ours on our freedom from vices may show, not that we are better than others, but that where our 'mortal frailty' has come out in them, in us it is smothered, not extinct. The little sins in us, (little, because we think them so,) in consequence of the advantages of our condition, may be more criminal and hardy than the vices which we so shudder at in others. Be this so or not, their drift toward destruction is more dangerous than that of greater crimes, because we are apt to feel more secure with them. Great iniquities are not easily forgotten, and are therefore more likely to be repented of; but habitual sins, those unoffending, those dormant reptiles, that we cherish in our bosoms, conceal their malignity, while they retain their venom. Resting quietly with them, and taking no thought of what passes within us, we are like him who inclines to sleep while the work of death is going on,—like him who is fortified by a charm in the moment of ruin. Pleased with these soft and silken cords, we perceive not that our onward motion

draws them closer, and, while the length, we may be permitted to go with them, is uncertain, heed not the ever revolving wheel which winds them up. Such is the false security, which the practice of sinning breeds in the heart. The warnings of God's word and of his providence annoy possibly, but alarm us not. In the bosom of fostering mercy—in the folds of divine compassion—we have grown cold, by a process deemed innocent, and, when any event or flash of judgment to come puts the question, what is the prospect? promising, responds our infatuated nature. This is truly a *human* conclusion, drawn from facts humanly perceived; and if nature be stronger than grace, she will continue to have the best of the argument to the end.

Believing what is believed not, perceiving what is perceived not, man may be largely knowing, according to his conceptions, though knowing little, according to truth. Sin and the love of it have benumbed and stupified his faculties, and it is only in his own eyes, 'which see not,' (though seeing,) that his ways appear clean. Self-examination and self-distrust, duties of self-preservation, are seldom entertained. They are often omitted, while there is the greatest composure and study in planning and executing deceptions on others, the success of which has the effect of a deception on our-

selves by blinding us to our design and guilt. Think of the infatuation of him, who, in concealing his true character from others, has concealed it from himself, having discernment enough to conclude he is good because not known to be bad by those whom he has deluded. Think of the complacency of him who takes satisfaction in a reputation which he knows to be undeserved, and seeks credit in reproaching vices which he shuns not, in praising virtues which he wishes not to possess. He is no stranger—we need not question whether we know him. Think, too, of the connexion between the respectability of vice and its prevalence, of the solemn air of him, who is pondering upon his ways, in contrast with the high looks of him, who is computing the avails of success in his secret and sinful designs; of a 'world, lying,' not more 'in iniquity,' than in wait to accomplish selfish ends, plotting in light, and sallying forth in darkness—and deny, if we will, that, in surprising others, we have not found ourselves on some of these concealed posts.

We may think our condition fair, with all the evidence there is against it, or we may know it to be ill, without concern, but either is the strongest proof, we can give, of self-ignorance and unbelief. What we appear to ourselves or others is no certain index of what we are, for though a corrupt tree will

not bear good fruit, yet it may bear fruit which we will take for good. The face of the earth presents no indications of the crystal spring, or of the golden mine, which lies deep beneath the surface; we may have conjectures about them, but to have knowledge, we must dig or bore until we find them. So, also, we may have depths of corruption, spirits in us—which none, not even ourselves, have suspected, and of which it may be said, 'This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'[1] The lake, whose surface is smooth and clear, may have a turbid fountain. The tree, that blooms and towers, may have a rottenness within. The object, which at a distance sparkles with beauty, when approached, often presents deformity.

There is a remarkable illustration on this subject in one of the epistles of Horace.[2]

> Vir bonus, omne forum quem spectat et omne tribunal,
> Quandocunque deos vel porco vel bove placat,
> "Jane pater" clarè, clarè quum dixit "Apollo;"
> Labra movet, metuens audiri: "Pulcra Laverna,"
> Da mihi fallere, da justum sanctumque videri
> Noctem peccatis et frondibus objice nubem.

"The good man, who is honoured in courts of justice and in all the assemblies of the great, whenever he would please the gods with a sacrifice, cries aloud and repeatedly, O father Janus, O Apollo! and at

[1] Mark ix. 29. [2] Epistolâ xvi. ad Quinctium.

the same time moves his lips, fearing to be heard, (that is, prays with the strong whispers of the heart,) 'O beautiful Laverna,' (a goddess deemed the protectress of thieves and impostors,) 'grant me success in deceiving, grant that I may appear just and holy, and cover my faults with a cloud, and my frauds with darkness.' This prayer is not more remarkable than instructive, as illustrating the nature of man. It is only nature overheard in whispering the secrets of its devotion. It is no very strange occurrence, and all that makes it striking is that it is brought so fully out in words. The worship of the Roman goddess has ceased, but the Roman heart is the heart within us, and the spirit of this petition, believe it, if not uttered in words, is often put forth most importunately in action and desire. This was the prayer of our first parents, when they hid in the garden. It was the prayer of Cain, when he said, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' though guilty of a crime so foul that it 'smelt to heaven.' It was the prayer of Peter, when he said, 'I know not the man.' It is the common prayer of sinners; the swift petition of all who *nightly* run to mischief. No man was ever guilty of a deceit or crime, which he did not desire to conceal, and with hope of concealment, who has not done that, which he did not dare to do without it? Words are but the mere reports to us

of desire in prayer, and sooner than they die on our ear, yea, sooner than uttered, the desire itself is gone to heaven; for 'the very thoughts of our hearts are known afar off.' Wicked designs and aspirations are not often viewed in this character, but if we knew of one who could give us impunity, they would all run in the forms of petition. Imagine men now believing in a *being*, who could prosper and protect them in injustice and crimes, and where should we go to escape his worshippers? The suggestion is sufficient to show that we could not live in such a world. Earnest prayer would not then be the rare practice it now is, and if fully answered, property, reputation, life, nothing would be safe.

How humiliating is this survey of human nature; and how should it startle the sinner to think of the desires that ascend from his heart daily, and will, till in consternation and despair he calls upon the mountains to fall upon him, and hide him from the coming retribution, or till, in another spirit, not that of nature, he cries, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!' Who that has lived long, and endeavoured with solicitude to live uprightly, has not in memory some concealed iniquities over which he wishes to weep, before that day 'when God will

make manifest the hidden counsels of the heart, when that which hath been spoken in darkness shall be heard in light, and that which hath been spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops?' O, the insolence and presumption of a being who cowers beneath the gaze of human vision, but trembles not at the sight of Him whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun,—who so much respects his fellow-man, that he wishes to deceive him with an appearance of excellence which he does not possess, but respects so little the Being who breathed him into life, that he is not concerned to conceal his iniquities from him, and neglects even the civility of thanking him for his gifts, a civility which he is scrupulous to pay to the most worthless of his creatures! Even the thief, as he lays his hand upon your property, has care that you see him not. The robber goes forth in the night; he accosts the stranger, and will have no witness by; but who, in the moment of guilt, stops to determine if God be the witness of his doings? Wonder not at the presumption of the thief, who steals knowing all eyes to be upon him, or of the robber, who commences his work in the presence of thousands: theirs is prudence, compared with the presumption of him, who, professing to believe that all his feelings and actions are known to God, still acts and feels as though he be-

lieved it not. This is impudence with a vengeance, and it has become so common, that nobody wonders at it. What a reflection is it upon our nature, if amid all our labours and sacrifices to acquire the esteem of mortals, we do not so much as think of the esteem of Him in whom we live and move and have our being, and who, forgotten by us in health and plenty, hears our cry in sickness and want! What indignity does he offer to his Maker, who, in love with mortal praise, pines away under mortal censure, who grieves for his earthly losses, and rejoices in prosperity and in the consolation and kindness of earthly friends,—but never sorrows for his sins, never rejoices in heavenly favour, never glows with love to Him who gave him his friends, his privileges, and all things here! What a display of divine forbearance is it, that we have this moment to remember our ingratitude, and to what a pass of degeneracy and insusceptibility has he come who (not like the plant bending all its leaves and branches toward the sun and putting forth flowers as in honour of its genial glare, but like one dropping all the growth of life toward the earth as with intent to grow to it) does not begin to admire and love, as he looks up the path of his existence, and sees the stream of mercy which has ever flowed along by its side, and which proceeded from the great and beneficent

source whence he started, and from which he has delighted to wander!

Reflections of this kind are natural and important, but we would not have them carry the mind of the reader from the immediate object of investigation, namely, the tendency of our depravity, in one way and another, to obscure the mind, and disqualify it for perceiving the true character of our own exercises and qualities. So great is this tendency, that the practice of sinning is found generally to diminish our sense of the evil of sin, and cause us to approve of acts which once appeared to be exceedingly sinful. On this principle it is that we account for the well known fact that truths, which are most influential in youth, generally lose much of their power in riper years; so much so, that we have the result of a mind, when it has become enlarged with knowledge, and capable (intellectually) of a fuller comprehension of the truth, and of all the lights that shine on it, and all the miseries and dangers of neglecting it, losing its capacity of being impressed by it, and contemplating it with an indifference hardly due to errors that have been long since detected and laid aside. But no error in this case has been discovered, none is acknowledged: still there is a change in the man; sin is not so sinful as it was; truth has lost its majesty; other objects have increased in importance

and the accustomed amount of conviction is gone. His sense of his own danger has diminished as he has become familiar with it, and his fear of God seems to have been expelled by the experience of success without his favour. He sleeps now; and all his thoughts about divine things are little better than dreams. He takes no alarm, and, whatever else he believes, he does not, he knows he does not, believe that sin is so terrible a thing as God or an awakened conscience represents it. And unbelief in this particular puts a thick veil upon the whole system of divine truth. If the eye be evil here, the whole *body* is full of darkness.[1] Take away this truth, or obscure its evidence in the mind, and the whole is tarnished; no other truth will be left entire; nothing will be perceived aright. Every deliberate sin is preceded by a process of unbelief in the mind with regard to some revealed truth; and hence the fruit of sinning is greater confidence in sinning, and a diminished consciousness of guilt and pollution. With all the defilements which attach even to the best of us, we should therefore have done with our confidence in the justness and accuracy of our conceptions of any truth, except as we are 'taught of God.' Only as he shines into our hearts do we see light and get understanding. The infatuation of sin is not more clearly

[1] Luke xi. 34.

seen in any thing, than in its power to charm away the sense of guilt and danger. This, let alone all its other effects, is sufficient to show that we are always in greater peril than we imagine. Men, who have lost their reputation, their all, by their iniquities, were once confident in their capacity and willingness to resist temptation, but depended not upon Him who alone is able to subdue the heat of the furnace, and to stop the lion's mouth.[1] The danger is not small, that even the Christian, if he permits the watches which he sets over his ways to slumber, will seek in concealment a protection for crime, or a covering for sin. Alas! what does observation, and what, we add, does experience teach us on this point? Man, who is not a discerner of the thoughts and purposes of the heart, sees but little of what composes our essential character; and well it is, if in what he sees not, we do not oftenest fail, and fail with the least concern. We may too as clearly deceive ourselves as others. The heart is ever in the mazes of sin, the varnished motives and idle conceits

[1] No system of religion that does not furnish *supernatural* aid can meet the necessities of man. This feature of Christianity entitles it to the homage of our purest reason. Our complete dependence on Divine aid, rightly considered, is our strongest ground of hope and encouragement. We can do nothing of ourselves; and when we learn to attempt nothing *alone*, we are coming to a right mind; we shall put forth Divine strength in arms of flesh, and so, shall be able to 'do all things.'

of self-love. Pride, the faithful guardian of the evil arcana of the soul, extinguishes the lights of truth, making those apartments of the mind, that were darksome before, totally dark. When this principle takes the lead, nothing works well. We see ourselves in our own light, which is only glorious, as our own.[1] We are thus deceived; we see nothing clearly and impartially; and, as we are apt to feel too secure to search after danger or to deal plainly with ourselves, no one can tell what the end will be.

It is to be considered also that imperfections and sins, once concealed in this way, are more ensnaring and dangerous to the soul than any other. Repentance for such sins, if ever it comes, generally comes late. The smiles of an approving world are soothing monitors of guilt concealed. He too, who, in

[1] Pride and vanity are a prolific source of error in our opinions of ourselves. Self-knowledge is the best corrective of them, but the difficulty is, that they arrogate this attainment, and thereby exclude it from the mind.

> —— The man whose eye
> Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
> The least of Nature's works, one who might move
> The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
> Unlawful ever. O be wiser, thou!
>
> Instruct that true knowledge leads to love;
> True dignity abides with him alone
> Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
> Can still suspect; and still revere himself
> In lowliness of heart.—WORDSWORTH.

the hope of concealment, can deliberately commit sin, is of all men least likely to reform while concealment lasts. Success in his efforts to hide his guilt generally imboldens the transgressor, and one instance of success after another is generally followed by an increasing frequency of crime. So it is with every kind of iniquity and fraud which human laws cannot reach and punish. These gain prevalence by slow degrees, and become viler as they prevail, till civil laws are violated; and still the sinner, *trusted*, and *reckless*, may seem to himself as harmless as when he began to sin. It is at the point of detection or exposure that repentance and reformation usually begin; and it is well, if the tears of such an hour are not selfish drops, drops that lull the conscience, without improving the heart. There is much of this kind of repentance. Men behold themselves detected in their iniquities; the pleasure of them is then gone, and can be remembered only as vapid and unsatisfying; they blame themselves for such follies past; they have something very like repentance, but it is merely restiveness under present difficulties; the love of self taking a new, a more profitable direction.[1] But the thing to be considered most is, that the change,

[1] "Thou may'st of double ignorance boast,
Who know'st not that thou nothing know'st."

whatever it be, and by whatsoever motives effected, is likely to be esteemed a virtue, and converted to an occasion of self-gratulation. Every view, therefore, which we can take of ourselves, warns us of the infatuating influence and fearful evil of sin, and teaches us, if we would live uprightly, to live humbly, and to have our trust in heavenly aid—not at all in ourselves.

CHAPTER VII.

Influence of character on belief—Direct application of the reasoning in the preceding chapter—Analogies between what men think of themselves and what they think of others—These considered as the cause and proof of infidelity—Indifference of men to religion not accidental, but the result of settled opinions—Mental processes by which these opinions are acquired—The deductions of sense taken for those of reason—Reason held in the service of sense—Singular love of the world—Our own depravity approved when it goes to excess in one direction, yet hated under other and lower manifestations—Idolatry—Analogy of its forms to human character—Condition of the heart—Its changes great, yet imperceptible—Nature, not counsel, taken for a guide in spiritual perplexity—Its inventions—Its resentment of the truth—Its proneness to clothe God in its own likeness—Spiritual idolatry—Analogies bearing on the general subject—True basis of practical infidelity.

We come now to make a more particular application of the reasoning in the preceding chapter to the proofs of infidelity. If the corruption of our nature, in one and another form of its action, perverts our judgment of our own moral qualities, it is reasonable to anticipate the same result when we estimate the moral qualities of others. This principle we have already considered at some length,[1] but we wish now to show more clearly its pertinence to our main object of inquiry. There is generally admitted to be a strong analogy between what men think of

[1] See Chap. II.

themselves and what they think of others. To point out all the analogies between their thoughts and habits, and the thoughts and habits which they ascribe to others, though it might be instructive and amusing, would not comport with the directness of design which, at this point of our progress, it is important to observe. A few examples of the general admission of this truth will be sufficient to clear the way for the use which we intend to make of it.

We have seen that belief is not so purely an intellectual process, as not to be overruled and controlled by the qualities and passions of the heart. For example, when we see a fault or a vice in those whom we love—a friend, a brother, or a parent—our affection so modifies our perception of its odiousness, that we never see the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In like manner, when a virtue is the virtue of an enemy or a rival, it is ill-favoured with us, and shares at best but the fate of the good man, who is suspected of evil for being found in evil company. The vices, crimes, and cruelties of a successful leader of an army are merged in the glory of victory, and seem often to lose their character in our view, so dimly do we perceive the spots that tarnish the objects of our admiration. Soon as we rise in life, like plants starting from the earth and expanding their leaves to the glare of the sun, we begin to

lend our feelings to influences and opinions, which must often be evil where what is evil, so often prevails and is approved. Intimately and variously associated as we are with evil opinions and practices in others, which, on account of our partialities, or for the seeming virtues with which they are connected, appear scarcely to be evil, it would be strange, when our making evil ours, or our loving it, diminishes the sense of its vileness, if we did not become so allied to evil, as to lose the ability of perceiving justly what is good. That we do acquire this disability, in some degree and by some process, appears to be the consent of mankind. So universal is the influence of our interests and partialities on our judgment of the character and conduct of others, that some recognition of it is made in legal enactments, and in all courts of justice. The presence of this influence is spontaneously acknowledged in all the relations and intercourse of life. We expect to see men's prejudices, corruptions, and interests coming out in likes and dislikes, and creating or effacing blemishes in the character of all around them. The greatest and the best of men are subject to this infirmity, this ill eclipse of the lights within them; and we need not here repeat that ignorance, self-sufficiency, selfishness, pride, and envy, (forms all in which our cherished depravity lodges itself, and

works wonders not readily known to us,) bring darkness into the mind, and render us specially liable to error and partiality in our judgment of others as well as of ourselves. Now the pertinent question is, whether our spiritual relations and interests, our various passions and corruptions, will be less likely to sully our perceptions, and deprave our judgment of the moral perfections of God? Can we sanely conclude, that as an object of contemplation he is the exception to the general law, lying without the sphere of that influence which we have seen darkening our understandings, plaguing our hearts with false interests and hopes, deceiving us in our opinions of our own qualities and virtues, and dropping its images on every object we behold? When we see the moral imperfections of men giving complexion to their judgment in analogous cases, shall we conclude that their conceptions will be unaffected by them in this the most important of all, the one of all others in which their conduct is manifestly inconsistent with just convictions, and in which they have the greatest temptation to find their likeness where no likeness is? Have we less to gain from discovering a semblance between ourselves and God, than from finding in us (as we will by reasonings false) goodness equal to that of any of our fellow creatures? Is our welfare less at

hazard while his favour is uncertain, than when the petty interests of a day clash with the wishes of a being who is hated because he covets and takes to himself what we, perhaps unwisely, desire for ourselves? Are we less prone to hate him, or to rid ourselves of his displeasure by self-imaginings of a *secret way* to his pardon, when we see his attributes, armed with omnipotence and arrayed against us as transgressors, all calling for the surrender of our fondest aims and delights, and proposing in their stead pleasures for which we have no relish, and pursuits to which all the growth of our life is averse? Is not this a plight from which all the deceits and powers of our nature are stirred to find a riddance, if not by faith and submission, certainly by shutting our eyes to the danger, or, what is more probable, by causing the danger to disappear through our acquired blindness to the defilement and guilt of sin, and a consequent inferring of his favourable aspect towards us? This would appear to be the common result, judging from the indifference of men who are in this condition. It may be said, however, that their indifference only shows that they see not their danger, not that they have disposed of it by this process; but this is drawing the difficulty back into thicker darkness, not bringing it out to the light. Indifference, in the case sup-

posed, is either an over-bold, a daring defiance of God, when the truth is fully seen—a thing most unlikely to be effected, and impossible to be attained; or it is the fruit of a compromise with sin, of mistaken views of ourselves and of God. There is no middle ground: men are not without opinions on this subject; and if they were, it would only prove them blind to their own blemishes and to the perfections of God, which is the very thing we wish to bring out—their unbelief in things as they are—their belief in them as they are not.

If we attempt an analysis of this state, we shall find no want of mental processes in it. Men do not accidentally fall into such easy views of their sinfulness as to lose all apprehension of God's displeasure; nor do they secretly arrogate his approbation, before undergoing a more secret process by which they succeed in evading the truth, and in possessing him with the same views of themselves as they, in the vanity of their mind, esteem to be fitting.[1] Not renouncing their sins, not em-

[1] This brings to mind what Coleridge, in his "Table Talk," says in illustration of the pretensions of the church of Rome. "The course of Christianity and the Christian church may not unaptly be likened to a mighty river, which filled a wide channel, and bore along with its waters mud, and gravel, and weeds, till it met a great rock in the middle of its stream. By some means or other the water flows purely, and separated from the filth, in a deeper and narrower course

bracing the truth in the love of it; but having the 'eyes of their understanding darkened' through the practice of sinning—every deception, every prejudice, every interest, so considered, of which our nature is capable, all are called to their relief—some flattering their passions and self-delusions, some deriding their fears, and others inventing modes of escape; and it is impossible to say how far they will carry them, but carry them into false repose, by causing them to misconceive and discredit things as they are, we know they will. This they have done, and their indifference to spiritual things is the proof of it. They have done it too against the clearest declarations of God; no ignorance of these declarations is pretended, and yet their conclusions fly in the face of them with a rudeness that seems to say that all fear, all belief of them, is gone. This is not an accident in their experience; it is the fruit of a long and varied process. First, sense indulged, sense predominating, sinks, debases, and enslaves reason, and thus impairs its force and vigour; and then, sense and reason, though hardly reason any

on one side of the rock, and the refuse of the dirt and troubled water goes off on the other in a broader current, and then cries out, We are the river." So our corruptions, blinding our eyes, are the more arrogant the greater their excess; and the more complete their separation from the truth, the higher their tide, and the more turbid—the readier they are to cry out, 'We are the virtues.'

longer, seem often to unite against faith in aiding our imperfect and partial views of things.

It is very observable, from our constitution as it now is, that, if we could banish the fear of evil to come, we should never be willing to change our condition for one more spiritual and heavenly. We appear to be made for the world, and insensibly grow to it. We wish for nothing better; and if the nearness and certainty of death did not check our fondness, we could be quite drowned in the pleasure of having an eternity here. We can be amused and pleased with the veriest trifles that have a respect to the present world; yet we cannot be entertained, cannot keep from wearying, while we are confined to hear only of God, and of the provision he has made for us in eternity. If God would let us alone, and not disturb our enjoyment, we would think of nothing more. We prefer heaven, indeed, to hell, because we have heard this last is a place of torment; but could we have our wishes, we would prefer to remain where we are. And so long as we continue of this mind, eternal life will be neglected, with all that belongs to it. We shall have no gratitude for a Saviour's compassion, we shall feel no attractives to be with him, we shall resent his cross, the gospel will be 'foolishness' to us; and when our duty is proposed, we shall feel that we are called to make a

great sacrifice; the whole interest of our nature will be stirred to resistance; and if we neglect it, it will not be by chance, it will not be turned off through inadvertence; but we shall prefer the world, we shall venture a little, and persuade ourselves more, that the danger, not so great as many would have it considered, will not be increased by our continued devotion to objects proper to our present enjoyment, and even made necessary to it by the will of the Creator.

Thus, there is, as we will think, reason in *our* choice, though that be but sense in the disguise of reason which *reasons* from our affections and preferences (assuming them to be right as they are) to our duty, and infers our safety in this or that course from our desire to pursue it. Yet so it is,—things appear quite rational that are greatly pleasing and desirable to us. But this our contentedness with the world, when the world goes well, together with our aversion to spiritual and eternal things, which is so great that we will not look to them, will not seek them, when we have nothing considerable, nothing satisfying, to enjoy or hope for from the world, yea often, when sin revives and turns all our feelings and remembrances into one great canker of guilt and dissatisfaction, constitutes a strong ground for inferring that, when we have much of the world to enjoy, and more of it to hope for, when the sense of our sins is

merged in the love of them and of ourselves, and spiritual things are not less disrelished, we shall find it easy to avert the glare of truth, and give a favourable countenance to our affairs and hopes. But to do this in such a case would not surely render us less chargeable with infidelity: it would be the strongest proof we could give, that we do not take God at his word, and do not credit things as they are; for it is appropriating his favour, and taking for granted our safety, if not innocence, when our sins and worldliness are at the flood. Our preference presumes, indeed, we do not perceive his superior excellence, or perceiving, do not relish it; and our want of solicitude, while we have not complied with the conditions of his favour, shows we have a way of *our own* to his regard, and are, it may be, attributing to him the blemishes of our own character, which appear to us not to be blemishes, because they are our own, or which appear to be very innocent defects, because it is our interest and pleasure to have them so considered. This is the ground of our security; and, let it be noted, it is as propitious to the claims of our faith as any other which can be supposed; for we must either admit this view of our case, or we must pretend that we have just conceptions of the character of God and of ourselves, and if we pretend the latter, while we depart not from iniquity and

seek not his favour, our conduct is witness we neither esteem his character nor value his favour; and what is it, not to esteem his character, but to be blind to it, or to think it worse than our own, which we do esteem? what is it, not to value his favour, but to prefer the pleasures of sin to it, to change his truth into a lie, and his glory into an image not his own, but ours?

When the depravity of our nature centres in one particular direction, or when it shows itself in any ruling passion, it is wonderful how readily we approve it in this character, and how acceptable it is to us in this, while in most other forms it may be odious. The reason of this seems to be the difficulty of seeing our own defects, and especially of seeing them as defects, or marks which distinguish us, when they have outgrown all adverse feelings, and become, as it were, the whole of our nature.[1]

[1] Our capacity for being swayed and moulded either by a good or evil principle or passion is as philosophically as beautifully expressed in the following lines:—

Toy-bewitch'd,
Made blind by lusts, disherited of soul,
No common centre man, no common sire
Knoweth! A sordid, solitary thing,
'Mid countless brethren, with a lonely heart,
Through courts and cities the smooth savage roams,
Feeling himself, his own low self, the whole;
When he by sacred sympathy might make
The whole ONE SELF! SELF, that no alien knows!
Self, spreading still! Oblivious of its own,
Yet all of all possessing!

At first sight, it might appear difficult to understand how we can be so grossly imposed upon in a point, which we are capable of knowing so much better than others; but it will not appear so, if we reflect that we are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions, prejudices, and inclinations are called in as dictators, and we suffer ourselves to see and be convinced just so far and no farther than they give us leave. They make it hard for us to pass an equitable judgment in matters where our interests are concerned, disposing us, when there happen to be strong appearances against the justice of the course to which we incline, to put favourable constructions upon them, and even sometimes, when the probing of interest is deepest, to assign and think we find the best and most convincing reasons where no reason can be seen by others. But the deceit is still stronger with us, and we much poorer casuists, when we come to judge of ourselves, the dearest of all parties; when the question is, what condemnation shall we pass on ourselves, or allow others to pass:—this is the labour—this the matter in which it is not human to see the light, when so much darkness is coveted; not possible to be severe, when there is such an instinct, such an impulse to be kind and partial, or to efface, for the time, all the tender impressions, with

which we find so much reason to be contented, and which have disabled us so long, from thinking justly of ourselves, that, thinking wrongly, has come to be with us, the soundest, as well as the most agreeable thinking we have. Hence it is we every day see men guilty of vicious and dishonest actions, who yet reflect so little, or so partially upon what they have done, that their consciences seem to be free from guilt, or the remotest suspicion, that they are what the tenor and evidence of their life show they are. They see what no one else sees, some secret and flattering circumstances in their favour, which make a great difference between their own case and that of other delinquents. Of the many false, revengeful, covetous, vicious, and, if it please, stupid persons, which abound in the world, there is not one that singles out himself as guilty, or that would not think it a slander to have any of his particular crimes or weaknesses, laid to his charge. It may be they join in a cry against sin, in every other form but that in which it prevails in their own practice, or that this form of it is hated in others, while, in themselves, it appears the more devoid of aggravation and turpitude, the greater the excess to which it is carried.

No one is competent to describe the many absurd and palpable deceits and cheats, into which the understanding is betraved by the sins that habitually

beset us; to trace the several turnings and windings of an evil heart, and detect it through all the glosses, shapes, and appearances, which it assumes; but none is more gross and common, than our failing to perceive the evil of any sinful temper or indulgence, when our practice, our fondness therein, has transported it to a passion. We cannot but be convinced this is so, if we will look on what is passing around us, especially, if we will look into our hearts and observe how actions stand there, how those which strong inclination prompts us to commit, and custom has made ours, something as our breathing is, are dressed out, as for public appearance, in all the gloss and character which a flattering hand can give them; while others, to which we feel no propensity, though perhaps not so bad in themselves, find no quarter from us, or at least appear deformed and naked, with all the proofs of folly and viciousness stamped upon them. The man who lives for pleasure, though a most useless body, cares not that he is useless, yea, worse than useless—knows no happiness but what is seated in his senses, stupid and overgrown with sense—and sees no harm, himself miserably harmless, in the indulgence and gratification of appetites, which, in his reasoning moods, he concludes were given him only for that end. He lives unto himself, yet stoutly despises others who live so in pursuance of different ends, and grows

perhaps virtuous in his own estimation, through a propensity to congratulate himself on his freedom from their defects, when he owes this exemption to a *fulness* of iniquity that is running over, and can therefore make no room for more. He who makes it his object to gain character and consequence, to establish the fortune and raise the name of his family, though his object be higher and worthier of your praise, runs an equal distance from God, bends his great soul, if you will call it so, to a god of his own, that is unspeakably below himself, and pays his devotions with a diligence which, rightly directed, would be more than sufficient to make his calling sure to 'the inheritance of all things.' In prosecution of what he prizes more than 'all,' and therefore in derogation of 'all,' he promises himself contentment with only a portion of 'that which satisfieth not'—he studies, contrives, rises early, goes late to rest, and 'eats the bread of carefulness;' he builds up and pulls down again, levels mountains and raises up valleys, turns rivers into dry ground and dry ground into rivers, all the while ready to pity or condemn those who pursue other designs, but acknowledging God in nothing, and in nothing disapproving of himself. It is the same with the proud, the ambitious, the self-conceited, and many other very common characters in life. They

cannot bear their likeness in others; in themselves, when their infirmity or viciousness runs to a passion, it is faultless. They have reasons to show it so. The purely selfish man doubts, when you tell him these are better motives than those which actuate his own mind. He considers the sacrifice of his neighbour for the good of others, was prompted by the same motive, which induced him to withhold his own bounty, the promotion of his individual interest, and that, if there be a difference in their characters, his own is the more worthy, because he has not attempted to cover his designs, or to win favour with the paint of benevolence. The miser decries prodigality, intemperance, and sensuality — vices from which he has been preserved by the love of money. If you persuade him to assist the needy, when he reflects upon it, though it may be the best deed of his life, he will be angry with himself, for having yielded to your solicitation; if you talk to him of the pleasures of beneficence, he will understand as little as the blind man would of colours he had never seen. Now, what idea will men of this description naturally form of God? What is there in the humility, the self-denial, the benevolence, which he deems essential to the glory of our nature, that would reconcile them to just conceptions of his character, or permit them to feel complacency in his

will? They must either renounce themselves, or renounce God, if they cannot, through self-flattery, change him into what he is not, and make him (as they do the conduct of others) accord with the dominant principles of their own character. It is not difficult to imagine which they will do. There is, in their peculiar passion, an overgrowth which will bear no competition, and when pressed to an extremity, it will discharge itself in implacable hate to any thing of a contrary nature. They will, therefore, find it much easier to believe they are in favour with God, to reason themselves bright and acceptable before him, than to welcome sentiments which set at naught all that they have ever done, and all that they have grown fond and perverse in thinking of themselves. While they remain unchanged, they might, without violence to nature, adopt the language given to mightier, perhaps not to more self-complacent, spirits:—

—— "What place can be for us
Within heaven's bound, unless heaven's Lord supreme
We overpower? Suppose he should relent.
..... With what eyes could we
Stand in his presence humble, and receive
Strict laws imposed, to celebrate his throne
With warbled hymns, and to his Godhead sing
Forced hallelujahs? .....
..... This must be our task
In heaven, this our delight; how wearisome
Eternity so spent, in worship paid
To whom we hate!"

If it be in accordance with the prevailing taste, the strongest growth of individuals, to have such views of heaven and of its worship, we may conclude that all men will cherish views of these and of like objects, bearing a clear analogy to the varieties of their own character, and, of course, delusive and unworthy.

There are other and very different cases, in which our judgment is carried by habit and association, which may serve to illustrate the same truth. He, who conforms not to a prevailing fashion, though he conforms to one, once equally approved by those who are now offended with his singularity, will soon be thought destitute of common taste and judgment, so great is the influence of association over our sense of propriety and elegance. A vice, also, which is detested by a man at one time, so often prevails in his subsequent life, without exciting his shame or remorse, that we are ready to say vice needs only to be practised to be approved; and indeed this result is often seen in the changes which occur in the character of large communities. Nations, as well as individuals, differ from each other in nothing, more than in their shame or approbation of vices and practices, which the Scriptures and right reason abundantly condemn. If fashion and practice in dress, in manners, and in vices, operate

in this manner upon our tastes and decisions, why may not they or similar causes—the obliquities and peculiarities of our own character—bewilder and pervert our judgment of moral qualities, when we look at them as existing in the character of God?[1] Light enough would burst on this subject, if we should open the history of our race, and see what wild and discordant opinions have been entertained, what wretched ignorance of most evident, and what

[1] "In one of the lunatic asylums of France, there is a maniac who is labouring under an interesting delusion. His serious impression is, that he was beheaded during the revolution, and that another person's head has been substituted for his own! Hypochondriacs have ere now fancied themselves hand-organs, articles of household furniture, or steam-engines—to say nothing of beasts, birds, and reptiles. Some have imagined themselves to be frogs imbedded in stone; others that they were sheets of glass, and would break to pieces (being cracked) if they attempted to move. These are extreme cases; but that of the guillotined maniac applies, with some small variation, to a far larger class of persons than may be supposed. To meet a man on the *outside* of a lunatic asylum, who believes that he has another person's head on his shoulders, is any thing but uncommon. How many of our ode writers have believed that they were severally possessed of the head of Pindar? Where is the orator who hesitates to point to his own individual caput as the head of Demosthenes? Scott's head is on a dozen pair of shoulders at least; and there is more than one writer living who can boast of the identical head of Milton. We are daily introduced to illustrious members of the family of the Wrongheads, who have never yet been inside a lunatic asylum." The writer (unknown to us) might have continued, that the vanity, selfism, or what not, which prompts so many to fancy they have the heads of others, would as easily appropriate their hearts, and as convincingly, with sufficient motive, discover their likeness to great virtue as to great genius.

ready belief of most absurd, principles in religion and morals, men have disclosed, who were even knowing and learned in many respects, but untaught of God in these.

Our own heart is a garden where all that is wholesome and delightful has claim to grow, but a garden now turned to a heath; it is a fountain where all knowledge springs, but a fountain which our corruptions have sealed up; it is a book, once plain and legible, but a book now so interlined with the insertion of our good works, and defaced with the erasure of our misdeeds, that we cannot read our own history in it, though it be as one written with our own hand. It has come to be reason enough for us, that we are good, if we be not 'as this publican,' if we keep 'clean the outside of the cup and platter,' if we 'outwardly appear righteous unto men,' though within we be 'full of hypocrisy and iniquity.' Though we be already on the lowgrounds of degeneracy, and choose to remain there, yet if we be raised as molehills above the common level, we become dizzy with our mountain bulk and height, and all glory seems to rise and set on us, reaching not to the depth below. It is our elevation that charms us so: it may be but a cold and barren one; lower places may indeed be blooming and teeming with the loveliest flowers and the choicest fruits;

still it is enough for our glorying that they are the lowlands, and that we are the heights. But though we are so easily deceived, so patiently ignorant of ourselves, and so inapt to take instruction directly from our own hearts; still we may discern, if we will not own, the features of our nature in the conduct of others. Facts in human practice, when considered in their origin and effects, when viewed as reaching before and after, have a relationship to us which we cannot deny, and assume the dignity of the truest 'philosophy, teaching by example.' The instruction thus imparted seems to come to us on our own authority; we yield to it with something of the grace, not to say elation, with which we receive the respect that is shown to ourselves. Facts, standing out and staring on us in every direction, evince that we are liable to the grossest error in our estimate of moral qualities, and that the great bent of our nature is to ascribe our likeness, or nothing better, to other beings, be our character what it may. Changes for worse are going on in the moral and religious sentiments of men, and no thought is taken of it, and no depreciation is felt. They are quickly at a distance from the goodness, if goodness it be called that was none, which caused them to look with horror on practices they now adopt and approve. The same is true of churches. neighbour-

hoods, and governments. Their degeneracy does not come in like a flood, bearing away at once all established opinions; but it steals its way along, showing no front that shocks the better sense, giving motion to the still waters of pride and self-confidence, loosing slowly the joints and pins of faith, raising differences to be made up by a compromise of better convictions, yet holding itself distant, till all is done without exciting dangerous alarms; so that, when men think themselves quite as good as ever, a new and evil order of things is in vogue; religion has her temples and followers yet, but her spiritual songs and devotions have nearly died away, the live coals on her altars are going out, and the worshippers are fancying themselves in a good condition, if they offer to God but the *actions* of what is now, though it was not lately so, an ordinary and moral life, without the scandal and alloys of a great impiety. When the true fervour and spirit of religion are thus lost, and its hopes still retained, no wonder that men bring to it their 'mint, anise, and cummin,' and stoutly defend its carnal ceremonies, high masses, and absolutions; for it is much easier to put in pretensions to holiness upon such a mechanical system as is left of it, than where the character is only to be got and maintained by a painful conflict with ourselves, a patient submission of our

wills to a service, which is as difficult as improving to our nature, because it improves only when it crosses and changes it. The current of our nature runs from the Creator: it may be clogged and directed this and the other way by our own creations, but never can be turned back by them. We may inflict wounds and pains upon ourselves, but we shall not find it so easy to excite a holy love to objects that are disagreeable to our hearts. We may daily cross ourselves with the hand, and count our beads; but nature will resent the task of daily numbering our sins, and crossing our fond desires. We may offer the sacrifice of bulls and rams, starve our bodies, or give them to the flames; but we shall find it more difficult to offer up our spirits as in dust and ashes to God; more difficult a great deal to give him in sacrifice 'the works of the flesh,' the lusts of pride, anger, intemperance, and revenge. We may wash and swim in holy water, and receive at the confessional absolution on absolution; but to live so as to find it through grace, not at the hands of men, but at the hands of God; to gain an unction from on high—this is the great achievement. So strong is the propensity in our nature to sense and self-reliance, that the understanding is unequal for preserving a just self-estimation, and no match for the impression of outward things: there may be the

greatest propriety and purity in things of this nature, nothing retained in our worship but what, duly considered, would excite and assist it; still this propensity, if unchecked, will show itself in a disposition to thank God that we are not 'as other men,' dreamers, bigots, or extortioners; while we are perhaps relying on external rites, 'straining at gnats, and swallowing camels,' keeping up appearances when reality is gone, and contenting ourselves with shadows when we might have substance. Looking to these changes, to the secret processes of them, and to their effects in depraving the judgment, it would be a singular stupidity in us not to see that there is no security for the correctness of our moral sentiments, but in the grace of God, and that we are liable, as others, to be turned and deluded 'after the same example of unbelief.' When, therefore, we aspire to know God, or to know ourselves, we shall but grow in the confidence of ignorance, unless we first empty ourselves of all vain conceits, and our hearts be fully convinced of our own vileness, yea, nothingness, in his sight. If we bring into our service high thoughts of ourselves, we shall have low thoughts of God; if we turn our desires and fondnesses into judges, they will clear the guilty.

He that 'builds his house upon the sand;'[1] that 'walketh in darkness;'[2] that 'knoweth not the way into the city;'[3] that 'hath said in his heart, There is no God,'[4] the Scriptures style a 'fool,' a man whose corruptions have rendered him void of understanding in sacred things, and hence the felicity of that expression of Solomon, 'the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness.'[5] On subjects purely intellectual men have had the absurdest notions, and the very excess of their absurdity has rendered them tenacious of their truth, for the greater the error, the more unwelcome is the exposure of it; but we should never believe, if we did not know, they could be so far forsaken of their reason, yet having so much impression of the existence and power of a Deity, as to fall down in his worship before stocks and stones which their own hands had carved, to read their fortunes in the stars, yea, even in the palms of their hands, and to guide their enterprises by the auguries of a providence made known by the flight, the posture, or the singing of birds. How absurdly, indeed, has man's sentiment of a Deity been disclosed! The annals of idolatry and polytheism, with all their teaching, teach that there

[1] Matt. vii. 26. [2] Eccl. ii. 14. [3] Ib. x. 15.
[4] Psalm xiv. 1. [5] Eccl. vii. 25.

is a true God, and that the tendency of our nature is to bring him down and fashion him as one of ourselves. Some degree of religious belief has descended through all the generations of men, with modifications as various as their character and condition. It is not that they believe nothing, but that they believe not the truth, which constitutes their idolatry—for something, it seems, they will believe; they will have a futurity, rewards and punishments, a providence; but they all bear stamps of their own creation, and show a carving and moulding to human tastes.

Now it matters not to the nature of idolatry, which as to the true God is but another name for infidelity, whether men make images and bow down to them, or entertain notions of God which represent him to the mind without his perfections—such in any respect as he is not, such as they are, such as any thing is; for we but debase him by our loftiest comparisons—there is nothing 'like unto the Lord our God, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth.'[1] Our idols may be 'without form, and void;' we may not call them 'legion,' but one, and that a spiritual being; yet if we endow him with our nature, make him speak peace to our fears, when our unmuffled guilt

[1] Psalm cxiii. 5, 6.

cries there is and can be no peace in our way of seeking it, what elevation can our faith and devotion give us? what better do we than they who worship gods of their own *hands?* They choose a more painful service, one less indulgent to nature; we rest our safety on no difficult conditions, incur no expense to our desires, and have the matter laid out to our taste at once.

It is clearly observable there is that in our nature which has 'sought out many inventions,'[1] which will hew out to itself 'cisterns,' and rest in them, though they be 'broken,' and 'can hold no water,'[2] will 'climb up some other way,'[3] will do any thing to gain its end; but how to find rest in Christ, it has no understanding, nor will have any; it labours or rests according to its own provisions, but never comes to the truth, nor will come, because it 'seeks it not by faith, but as it were by works'[4]—verifying by all its devices the words, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence.' Within the circle we thus draw for ourselves, we too often run the race of life, try all experiments, and sit down at last, wearied and empty—in utter despair of success—having nothing to trust to, nor knowing where to lay the fault, whether in the incapacity of our nature, or the insufficiency of the provisions of the

[1] Eccl. ix. 29. [2] Jer. ii. 13. [3] John x. 1. [4] Rom. ix. 32, 33.

Creator. We think we have done well—done what we could—but our foundation fails, dread darkness covers the future, and we know not which way to turn or where to betake ourselves for refuge. We trust to any thing before Christ, or trust him blindly now for want of other trusts, drop dead for his arms, when dropping we can catch on nothing else, and take him, when we have not the sense that we take him—a choice of evils. What so hard to believe or do, as that which turns our wisdom to foolishness, and brings us learners at the foot of the cross? What so thwarts our unconsidering humour as to be shut up to self-loathing, and left to utter dependence on the grace of others? What shifts we make of it! What colours fancy on us, and what smiles provoke, to rid ourselves of fear! Our many-formed unbelief—stout of heart and witty of invention—drives out the conviction here and there, discharges the cloud, and brings on the light and calm again. In every form it takes, it has our features, and its reasonings all a tincture of our virtues. No wonder men often find their self-sufficiency a greater trouble than their sins, and take the truths of God easier than the surfeits of his bounty—their *faith* has put them to sleep. They fancy him to be, if not 'altogether such a one as themselves,'[1] yet such as makes them

[1] Psalm l. 21.

think 'they were in great fear, where no fear was.'[1] And if we would largely consider this tendency of our nature, it might lead us to discover the causes of our indifference to the truths of divine revelation. That we have an indifference, which appears wonderful, and unlike any thing else in human practice, when contrasted with the weight and interest of what is revealed—that we have this tendency to invest all the beings of our contemplation with our own qualities—both are truths which we do but prove by being blind to them, and which, if they may not claim our assent that they are revealed, may claim it at least that they are supported by the most convincing evidence of analogy. Whence is it that the Ethiopians, when they would paint their gods in the highest style of beauty, colour them black, if not because it is their own complexion? Whence the character ascribed by impostors and idolaters to their deities, if not from the principle of transferring their own qualities to the objects of their worship? Whence the sensual paradises and Elysian fields which these deities are to provide for their votaries, if the former are not supposed to approve of those sensual gratifications which are the chief delight of the latter, and which, therefore, they imagine to be the appropriate reward of their

[1] Psalm liii. 5.

service? Whence is it that they are generally supposed to be capricious, revengeful, the protectresses of thieves and impostors, or the encouragers of destructive passions, if there be not a tendency in us to conceive all beings like ourselves, and to transfer to the invisible agent, which we worship as God, those qualities with which we are familiarly acquainted, or those of which we are intimately conscious? Whence is it that many, on whom the true light shines, think themselves so moral in their practice as not to need an atonement, and find it so difficult to believe in a pure and spiritual religion which requires them to 'look at things not seen,' if they have not too low conceptions of the nature of sin and holiness, to have any relish for a religion which does not approve and reward their virtues, or to think it credible that beings so inoffensive as they should ever find aught but smiles of favour in the face of Him who made them? Whence is it that others can rely on the atonement for pardon and salvation, without any renovation of their nature, if they are not so in love with their lusts and vices, that they have lost the sense of their guilt, and the fear that they are displeasing to God? Whence is it, if not on this ground, that they can count on fulness of joy in his presence, without a change of those dispositions which create

a disrelish for his worship here? Whence is it we so often see men, who profess to believe the word of God, dissatisfied with plain and uncompromising exhibitions of its truth, if sin has not wrought a proneness in our nature to narrow the breadth of its commandments, and to make them wink and connive at our cherished imperfections? Whence is it we so often see delinquents lull their remorse by making allowances for the strength of temptation, and by considering examples of similar delinquency in the life of others, not repenting or entertaining the design of their duty, if there be not something in the very alarms of guilty men which drives them to means of justification, and so, if may be, to put out the fire which burns and lightens in their spirits, without removing the materials by which it was enkindled? Whence the blindness to moral colours, and the stupidity which we see to be the unfailing concomitants of great viciousness of life, if there be not something in the practice of iniquity that tends to extinguish the sense of its odiousness, and to fill the sinner's mind with dreams of security and acceptance, just when his danger is greatest? Whence do we see men devoid of religion so prone to judge of the excellency of its precepts, and of its Author, from the defects of those who profess to be influenced by it, as if water from a polluted stream suited

their taste better than that of a pure fountain, as if they could discern the character of a distant object better in twilight than in the blaze of noon, or their reason directed them into swamps and marshes to determine the true and healthful properties of springs that issue in perpetual clearness, sweetness, and abundance from the heights around them? Whence this very ominous propensity, if they would not weigh themselves in 'unjust balances,' if there be not too much brightness in the sun for their unpractised eyes, if they 'love not darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil'?

It is plain from these and similar examples that men are liable to the greatest delusion in their estimate of their own qualities, and that the same causes operate to delude them in their judgment of others. It is also plain that the chief cause of this delusion, in what measure so ever it exists, is sin. It renders us very incompetent judges of the excellence of any being with whom it is our interest to be found in likeness, and this incompetence will be greater or smaller as we are more or less depraved.[1] This principle

[1] "It is the soul's prerogative, its fate
To change all outward things to its own state:
If right itself, then all without is well;
If wrong, it makes of all around a hell.
So multiplies the soul its joy or pain,
Gives out itself, itself takes back again."

granted, let it once be clearly seen that our moral character spreads itself through our perceptions, and controls our judgment of the character of others, and it will result that we may be infidels, as to the real truth and character of God, when we think ourselves very fair believers. Very fair believers then we may be, yet believing nothing as it is, nothing as adapted to awaken the conscience and improve the heart, but much that is contrary to all good effect. We suppose this to be the state of secular men generally. We think it the origin of their indifference to religion; of their worldliness in a world that lies so near eternity, and has so much of its influence expended in it; of their wretched misconception of, and hostility to, doctrines which cross their nature, and presuppose in them a repugnance to what is good. Theirs is, therefore, a sinfulness with which they are not acquainted, and which they cannot credit until a revolution takes place, both in themselves and in their oldest and fondest associations and hopes. As unsuspected, and as operating in this manner, it is the basis of popular infidelity. And so considering it, we shall have, perhaps, a better understanding of our difficulty, and of our remedy. This view, certainly, accords with our experience and observation. Human depravity, modified and restrained as it may be, drives directly to this result.

So long as we are without proper views of sin in ourselves, we see not but this must be the case. We may change in outward actions; we may have legal convictions; the terrors of the Lord may make us afraid; but till the Spirit lays the rule of truth to our actions, and 'takes of the things of Jesus Christ' and shows them to us,—till the commandment revives and we die,—we shall know nothing as we ought to know; we shall not know our weakness and dependence; we shall not see what an 'evil and bitter thing' sin is; we shall discover nothing faulty in our vain attempts to wash it away. We may have fears from its guilt, but we shall have no shame from its defilement. All our thoughts about it will be thoughts of unbelief—motions for a compromise with the truth. We see not how any view of sin, or of our condition, that does not humble us, cause us to take side with God against ourselves, and bring us all-nothing-worth and thankful to Christ, can of itself be entitled to a better name than infidelity. It cannot comprehend the truth; it procures a peace which is contrary to it, and obstructs its access to the mind. What more can infidelity do? It would not leave us to think we are believers. But what advantage is it to think so, if we believe not the truth, and have only a creed of errors? It may prevent our seeing that we hang in air, but can yield us

no support. In either case, it is a want of correct views of truth that does the mischief. We see nothing but this to hinder our embracing the truth in the love of it, as a man will betimes and thankfully fly for safety, when he sees his danger. The more general impression with us is, that we see things straight and right enough, but a want of will or power keeps us back. But we do not take this to be a true statement of our case. We see nothing right and fully, and a want of such seeing keeps us where we are; that is, we do not take God at his word; we let our nature interpret things for us; we cook and season them to our relish, and then think, if the effect is not adequate, the fault is not in us,—not at least in our want of accuracy. Did we see the whole truth, see sin as a most abominable thing, hated of God, and hateful in itself, see ourselves, 'led by foolish and hurtful lusts,' weak, erring, knowing little, and not able to know much, we should see wisdom in what we now call 'the foolishness of God;' we should abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes; things, which we had only heard of and thought about before, we should *see* and *know*, and we should, without thought of any invention, gladly repair to the 'fountain set open for sin and uncleanness.'[1] Nothing can be truer than

[1] Compare this with what Job says, chap. xlii. 3—7.

the deficiency of the sinner's views of truth, especially the deficiency of his views of the nature of sin, and of his own sinfulness; and as this is a sufficient, a rational explanation of his indifference, we need look no farther. It would be well to stop on this in the full conviction that we are deluded; that we do not see things as they are, do not know ourselves, and can do nothing as of ourselves. This would be so far a right understanding, and might lead on to right action: but no—we will not receive truths so deeply wounding and offensive to our humour. We are not 'undone' yet; we do not believe God when he says, 'Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.'[1] O no—this is not our condition. We can help ourselves yet, can improve a little, can do 'works without the grace of Christ,' which will make us more *worthy* of the favour of God. We have not truth enough in the mind to bring us to Christ, but just enough to make that disagreeable to us, and to put us upon a task-religion, a faithless service, (faithless as to God's word,) whereby we stifle our apprehensions of guilt and danger. All these are attempts to patch up a righteousness of our own, and indicate, not faith in the gospel, but a desire to 'climb up some other way,' to bring a 'price for life;' to evade the punishment, without abandon-

[1] Hos. xiii. 9

ing the practice of sin. They all suppose the belief of some native goodness in us, and a disposition to make the best of our state before God. They show, therefore, the grossest misconception of essential truth, a virtual disbelief of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. Those truths, which should inspire hope and confidence in the breast of an awakened sinner, are blank and void. The whole system is without form; as a 'root out of dry ground,' having no uses that we should desire it. We have views which dispose us to dispense with the atonement of Christ; but this surely appears to be a cheering and indispensable truth, if we see our deserts aright,—yet a very humiliating and offensive one, if we see them not. Hence the prevalent disposition to lower the standard of holiness to what we conceive to be within the reach of our own powers. Hence the holiest men have the deepest sense of their indebtedness to Christ, and the most affecting apprehensions of personal unworthiness and defilement; and this brings us again to the principle we have had in view; for whence have the holiest men the most vivid perceptions of the nature of sin, and of their own ill-desert, if it be not true that our perception of moral qualities, whether good or evil, is modified by our own character?

CHAPTER VIII.

Singularities in human conduct—Importance of knowing ourselves—Proneness to possess God with our own likeness—Causes of delusion in our judgment of him—Application of the subject to the reader—Reasons for distrusting his own opinions shown by various analogies—Continued argument with him—Separate responsibility of the head and heart—Peculiar evidence of divine truth—Difficulties in the way of believing—When they are insuperable—How overcome—Misconceptions of the gospel—Necessity of divine grace—Questions and troubles about human ability considered—Office and sacrifice of Christ how estimated—Characteristics of the times—Needful despair—Proofs of infidelity.

Most of us are aware of the frauds and deceptions which run through all ranks of men, and endanger our peace and security in a thousand ways; and it is singular so few of us should ever be upon our guard, or see that more fatal hypocrisy by which we deceive and overreach our own hearts. It is indeed very singular we can be so readily convinced of the self-delusions of others, and yet never be suspicious and wary of ourselves; so sharply observant of things around us, and yet never retire within ourselves to notice what is passing there. It is a flattering and beguiling distemper which we have, and, if we will not undertake the task of its examination

with a curious and impartial eye, how knowing soever we are in other respects, we shall be ignorant in this, the most important of all; we shall be unapprized of a thousand mistakes; our self-deceits will carry us from ourselves, and bring us in such reports on what we do as suit our inclinations.

The conduct and experience of men, as we have seen, furnish strong analogies in support of the position, that there is a general tendency in our nature to ascribe our own views of sin and of ourselves, to God; to possess him, so to speak, with our own character. This tendency admitted, we see at once the great importance of being acquainted with ourselves, and with the various deceits to which we are liable. Without such acquaintance, we can have no ground for trust in our views of the character of God, or of our standing in his sight. Nay, so apt is our depraved nature to fondle and cherish its own creations, that the great danger is, our self-deception will be more complete and inveterate on this subject than on any other, and we become chiefly wedded to the worship of that object, which bears the greatest likeness to ourselves, as thereby we fall in smoothly with our own propensity, and come unawares to honour ourselves most, yea, to receive the worship which is offered as to another. We cannot be too apprehensive of this danger, or too highly

prize a knowledge of the causes from which it proceeds.

The conclusion, to which our past reasoning has tended, may seem to have little to do with us, if we think we have little to fear from the impositions of an evil heart. It should therefore have a more particular consideration, that we may not fail of being duly impressed by it, or evade its application to ourselves, through the same deceits by which so great a cheat is first effected. We are, certainly, in no case so liable to this deception, as when judging of the character of God. If we can divest him of every aspect of terror and evil to us, we shall have gained the point of nature; we shall rise in self-estimation as we depreciate in excellence, and so prove 'there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, when the end thereof is death.' Who will hold his eye to the light which 'makes manifest the hidden counsels' and miseries of the heart? Who will seek to be familiar with moral perfections which require him to forsake 'all ungodliness and worldly lusts,' which will not bend to accommodate any selfish passion, and which pass as in streams of lightning along the path of his being, and through the recollections of his soul, giving image to the dangers which beset him who does not conform, and move in harmony with them? O, who can trust his ability to

think worthily and impartially, of the perfections of Him 'whose eye'

'Views all things at one view,'

when, as a sinner unreconciled, his passions, fears, interests and hopes, with ceaseless cry, are importuning and bribing him for a decision in their favour? Will you, reader, refuse to allow the testimony of a supposed criminal, to his own innocence, when the interest he has to escape conviction is involved in the punishment of a day, and yet confide in the testimony of your *deceitful heart*, to the nature of the moral attributes of God, when you are induced to level them to your own nature, or to elevate your nature to them, by all the interest you feel, to continue your sinful indulgences and spare your fond desires, without parting with the hope of his favour at last? Will you refuse in a court of law to admit the testimony of certain individuals on account of the partialities that grow out of the intimate connexions of life; or will you refuse to commit your your cause to be tried by jurymen, who are suspected of prejudice against your interest, and yet pretend that you can be trusted to judge worthily of the perfections of God, with whom you are connected as a dependent and accountable sinner, and between whose service and your inclinations there is a hos-

tility, which commenced with your moral being, and has strengthened with your years? We need not say that neither your philosophy, nor practice in other respects, justifies this vain presumption. But if you do not so judge, the question is, why are you so indifferent to spiritual things? It is clear you would have alarms for your welfare, if you had just conceptions of God,—for all his requirements and purposes are not only consistent with his character, but emanations and proofs of its perfection. Should you see a criminal, under sentence of death, to whom conditions of pardon had been proposed, gazing coolly on the preparations making for his execution, you would conclude he either did not perceive his danger, or else had determined to die. But as a sinner, it may be, you are ready to own you do not see your danger, and cannot confide in the justness of your notions of God, and still have not determined to die in your sins. You must then trust in something. What is it? 'Show me thy faith by thy works.' If faith have works and you show them not, but show contrary works, are they not the works of infidelity? To say nothing of dissoluteness, profaneness, or viciousness of any kind, where pride, covetousness, discontent, uncharitableness, impatience, pusillanimity, and 'such like,' abound, can faith be there? Can a man believe there is a

God, and still affront him with a cherished preference of the world? Can he believe there is a judgment to come, a heaven, a hell, and yet so little regard his life, slight infinite blessedness, and rush on infinite wo? We may well suspect there is no such faith. We rather think he is making his escape through the ways of his own invention. You see not your danger, or seeing it, are not alarmed. Is there not some self-deception in your case? There is, certainly, ground for industrious inquiry into the nature of your indifference to the peril of your condition. You are under sentence of death. Conditions of pardon are proposed to you. You do not accept them. The time of execution is at hand. You are approaching the fatal crisis, and still your attention is occupied with the pleasures of the way. You do not expect to suffer the penalty of the law, and why are you indifferent to the peril of outliving in guilt 'the day of salvation?' Clearly, you see not your guilt—you value not the pardon offered to you. And what is this but infidelity? What is it but to doubt the word of God, to reject his Son, 'to make him a liar,' and to suppose he would terrify you with intimations of evil, to which you are not exposed by the principles of your character? It is in effect to doubt his opposition to the reign of sin and Satan, and to make him, not 'altogether such a one as thy-

self,' but a great deal worse than you allow yourself to be. Your account of the matter may be this and another; your quiet of conscience may come in this and another way, but all may be reduced to infidelity at last. Not to perceive things God has revealed, is to doubt them. Lose your right and effective perceptions of them as you will, traces of unbelief may be found in all the turns and windings of the process. There is not a sin you commit but has a strong spice of it, and your indifference, your worldliness, your distaste to spiritual things, is but its ripened fruit.

Will you shun this conclusion by saying you perceive the peril of your condition, and are yet able to rest because you regard it to be distant? To say this, is to confess you discover no reasonableness or propriety in the divine law to constrain you to obey it, no loveliness or beauty in holiness that you should now desire it, no deformity or turpitude in sin that you should now avoid and hate it. It is doubting God's anger against evil doers, and presuming on his forbearance and your security, against the declarations of his word and the course of his providence. It is preferring other things to his favour for the present, and presenting a reason for future amendment—escape from threatened evil—which infers in you no sense of obligation to amend, and no con-

sideration for his will. It is discarding as delusive or false all his promises of good, (not trusting in them at all, not at all prizing the blessing they engage,) and only fearing evil as our nature but too well suspects it, rather than fearing it as revealed. This is the amount of your defence; and it leads us to the same conclusion from which it was designed to afford an escape, namely, that your indifference to the peril of your condition arises from the infidelity involved in the belief that God regards things as you do; that he is 'altogether such a one as you are.' It is a most specious deception, that which enables you to disbelieve all you will, under the pretence of faith and the colour of believing all you should. As in the Romish doctrine the sacramental bread is made God, and souls are thus deluded, so your depravity, running through and debasing your thoughts of God, amounts to the possessing of him with yourselves—a making of him such a divinity as may prove destructive to your soul—an entering and concealing of your sins in him, so that, you come not to know your difference from him, or to fear his displeasure with you. Such appears to be the ground of your security, all smoothed and chalked by that airy casuist of our bosoms, who looks into the clear sun at noon, and all is darkness; who casts on all objects his own shadow, and therefore claims them for his

kindred,—changes all colours into one, and boasts that one to be his own.

That the matter presents itself to your mind in this form and character, is not at all likely. You may or not have some definable ground of religious trust—your faith may take in the nominal doctrines of Christianity; but the secret of its inefficiency, where does that lie? Not in the nature of the things to be believed; and none pretend they have any power in their name. It is not the name of a Christian, but Christ that is in you, that gives you life and power with God. Whether you are trusting in your own righteousness, in the accuracy of your creed, in the exuberant mercy of God, or what commands soever you have kept—if the great commandment of love is neglected—none of these make you an 'Israelite indeed;' no more than a veil makes a saint, a cowl a monk, or a laboratory a chymist. An infidel may do all these; but 'with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,'[1] that is, unto justification before God. That you have not so believed, your acknowledged indifference shows. It is called believing 'with the heart,' because it takes effect in the mind, only when the heart cordially approves of the object; and it is only when we mistake and misconceive spiritual objects, that they are

[1] Rom. x. 10.

not lovely and engaging. Our hearts and minds are not such separate things in the business of religion, as our notions of their localities would indicate. They are not such separate agents in the responsibility of believing, as we sometimes take them to be. That we do not feel suitably towards the objects of faith, we venture, arises from our want of suitable views of them. That wrong feelings, preoccupied hearts, occasion this defect, may be, but the mind has taken the lead in this derangement and assents thereto. True faith, after all, seems little more, nothing more that we can see, than a believing of things rightly perceived. Pure hearts are apt to believe very strongly, because to the pure the objects of faith are pure. The heart—poor and empty—we fear is charged wrongfully, when we call it that dead thing which will not respond to our perceptions, blame it for all the ill we do, and let the mind go clear. When we have seen the promptness with which some men acknowledge the faults of their hearts, taxing them often with unsparing severity, at the same time they resent the slightest reflection upon their mind, the great seat of intentions and executive of desires, we have been suspicious this might be one of our nature's dangers, one of the covert ways in which we seem to loose ourselves from responsibility, and are betrayed into a notion

that we are rather unfortunate than guilty in most of the wrong we do. It is, certainly, well to have it settled in the mind, that the heart follows the lead of *ourselves*, and that all the blame we charge on it is *ours*. If we *will* think much of our minds, it should be, because they control the heart through the ministry of right perceptions of those objects which are adapted to move its affections along the course of right reason and faith.

There is a peculiar evidence of divine truth which you never see—see what else you will—if you judge of it merely by the intellect, much less, if the intellect be swayed by adverse affections. But when the repugnance of the heart is overcome, we have this evidence in the substance, the relish of the truth; we then see a conspicuous excellency in it, which approves it to the mind, and confirms it by a happy experience of its power and sweetness. There is nothing at all supernatural in this, nothing contrary to the laws of general experience. We may hear much of the excellent qualities of an individual, but there is a certain evidence which they seem not to have, though they be such qualities as we approve and fully believe to exist, till we have, so to speak, some experience of them which moves on our affections. They have a brightness, a loveliness then, which engages all our confidence, and

makes us feel, whether the subject of them be present or absent, that we know in whom we believed.

So then, there is as much true philosophy as divinity in the words of our Saviour, when he said, 'How can they believe who seek honour one from another, and not that honour which cometh from God? How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of God.' They have their affections pre-engaged; they do not '*seek first* the kingdom of God;' and all the glories of it compare not in their estimation with the objects they *have* chosen. They cannot therefore perceive aright the things to be believed, nor can the heart be moved towards them, till it breaks its present hold. This will give you an insight into the condition of secular men generally. They may not be seeking honour or riches, but seek what they may, and something they are all seeking before the 'kingdom of God,' it will exclude for the time the possibility of faith. The Bible does not, reason does not, tolerate the preference of any object to God. Take away this obstacle, disengage the heart, and *how hardly shall they not believe*, when they are thus left to see without bias the excellency and obligation of spiritual things? In proportion to the strength of men's worldly attachments—their fondness and persistence in forbidden ways—is the difficulty they experience in

believing. No conviction of spiritual things can be gained, which will make any due impression, whilst the heart is held in a preference of other things. Hence, if it be necessary we should undergo an *entire* change, we see that the requirement of supreme love to God, a love preferring him before all other things, is founded in the necessities of our nature; it is indispensable as a cause of the effect to be produced. Without it, we cannot believe, cannot rate the value of things as they are, and must consequently lose that influence from them, which is essential to our renovation, our realizing faith.

When our Saviour, discoursing on this subject,[1] said, 'How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!' it was a natural and reasonable inquiry of the disciples, as he strengthened the assertion—'Who then can be saved?' He had used a comparison which made it appear quite impossible that any should; but had they considered what it is to 'trust in riches,' that is, to prefer and rest in any created good, they would have been convinced that none so doing could believe, could be saved. Few persons of this description have as much consideration for religion, as he who 'came running,' and saying, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' He had done much in his own

[1] Mark x. 23—28.

way; he had observed the commandments from his youth; yet, when required to give up that on which his heart relied most, he was not ready, 'and went away grieved.'

When it is considered how many things we may do, and what surrenders we may make for the favour of God, and yet be unable to bear a touch in the tenderest spot of interest, or to deny a favourite indulgence, it is a comfortable and encouraging doctrine, that which our Lord taught his disciples in answer to their question—'With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.' They, who quarrel with this doctrine, may be suspected of hoping more from themselves than from the grace of God; but they are not the readiest to abandon their reliances; to 'forsake all, and follow Christ.' And if you turn your thoughts back to the deceptions which have been traced out, to the false reliances, lurking places, and fair forms of unbelief, and mark the deep aversion to spiritual things which runs through them all, and then weigh impartially what you have done and are ready to do, and infer thence what you will be likely to do, 'to inherit eternal life,' we submit, it will be difficult for you to ground any confidence in yourself. Still, we misjudge if there is not much practical misconception and error on this point, among those

who profess to receive the truth, and to be fully persuaded of their dependence. Their faith, however correct it may stand to the mind, does not bring them in practice to despair of other relief, and to surrender themselves into the hands of God. It does not make them importunate at a throne of grace, or distrustful and apprehensive of their strength against sin. When they are induced to do any thing for the soul, they generally proceed in a way that seems not to recognise the doctrine of their dependence. Instead of coming to Christ as helpless, self-destroyed, hoping in mercy, and claiming nothing, they are ready to do almost any thing before this the one thing needful.[1] They check themselves in sin, pray, read, and 'do many things,'

[1] Whatever causes the undervaluation of Christ and his offices, is of the essence of infidelity. We can no more do without him in religion, than we can trade in the world without money or credit. This point cannot be too much considered. It is our *natural* infidelity, so to call it, its easiest, earliest manifestation, that which we style our proneness to overlook it in our religious thoughts and hopes. "But if you think to overcome this death, this sense of sin, by diversions, by worldly delights, by mirth, and music, and society; or by good works, with a confidence of merit in them; or with a relation to God himself, but not as God hath manifested himself to you, not in Christ Jesus; the stone" (your sin) "shall lie still upon you till you putrefy into desperation. To be a good moral man, and refer all to the law of nature in our hearts, is but *diluculum*, 'the dawning of the day;' to be a godly man, and refer to God, is but *crepusculum*, 'a twilight;' but the meridional brightness, the glorious noon and height, is to be a Christian; to pretend to no spirit

with a view to prepare themselves for divine acceptance, ('and these ought they to have done, and not to have left the other undone;') and it is a great mercy if God leads them, through these winding and perplexing ways of their choice, to find the truth at last; to come empty-handed to Christ, willing to be saved on his terms, and able to trust in his sufficiency, who is All in all.

That they discredit the gospel, or misconceive its plainest import, is abundantly clear from their proneness to rest in the merit of their own works; and they hear so much of their *ability*, and are often so stoutly and broadly assured of it, that it is perhaps not all their fault that they forget its true conditions, and set themselves to the work much as they would if no redemption were provided for them. If they would let their own consciousness, their active nature, turn teacher on the question of their ability, they would be more likely to practise the true philosophy of religion. Men are seldom in despair with regard to their religious prospects: it is not the want of hope which makes them careless and worldly, not a persuasion that religion itself is unimportant to them, but a faithless adventure on the

ual, no temporal blessings, but for, and by, and through, and in our only Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus; for he is the first resurrection; and 'blessed and holy is he that hath part in this first resurrection.' " —*Dr. Donne's Discourse on the First Resurrection.*

forbearance of God, and on their own capacity and disposition to do their duty at a future time. We see not what need they have to know more of their ability, than is taught them by the praise or blame, the right or wrong, which they naturally ascribe to their own doings. They cannot divest themselves of these prime ideas of truth: they are revelations of God within us, and, though their 'counsel be often darkened by words without knowledge,' they will come out at last in vindication of the divine requirements. It is singular men should perplex and hamper themselves with a question which so little concerns their practice, that they leave it without conscience of it, whenever the thing to be done appears both practicable and desirable. And if their duty to God appear not both practicable and desirable, it is a want of faith and complacency, not in their ability, but in the testimony and nature of the thing to be done, which prevents its appearing so. They are not straitened in themselves, or in God, but in their views of the *outward* thing which he requires.

Christianity is a warfare, and, considered as a practice, is called in the Scriptures, 'fighting the good fight of faith.' It enjoins on us duties which are most difficult to nature; to think lowly of ourselves, to seek not our own things, to wave the regard and praise of men, to disclaim our

own worth and desert, to bear wrongs and affronts, without seeking or so much as wishing any revenge, and to meet all crosses and disasters without dismay or complaint, meekly, gladly giving 'patience her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire.' They have not the courage, the decision, to adventure striving thus with themselves, with the 'lusts which war against their souls.' They are irresolute and pusillanimous; and to think of stooping so low, of running such hazards, and enduring such hardships; to think of curbing their appetites and passions, of waving their rights and interests, of crucifying their own members, pulling out right eyes, and cutting off right hands—is a thing that daunts and puts them to a stand, and quashes all resolution and inclination to close with the Christian command. There is nothing unusual in the process; it is the same difficulty as that which they feel, when any painful, humbling, or unpromising service is proposed to them. They decline it for the sole reason, that it is painful, humbling, unpromising, or in any other sense disagreeable; and it does not alter the case, or affect their responsibility in it, that it is their love of ease, their pride, their incredulity, or their distaste for the service, which makes it appear so. The whole trouble seems to be, that they 'resist the truth, being men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concern-

ing the faith,'[1] 'destitute of the truth.'[2] And, while the matter stands thus, while they know they do wrong continually, and do it voluntarily, against their firmest resolves and their clearest convictions of duty, what if they should begin to distrust themselves and to despair of amendment? This is precisely the feeling they ought to have; it is their first approach to an understanding of the truth, and, instead of making them more careless in impenitence, it would drive them to seek relief from God, to cast themselves upon his mercy—the only proper direction and exercise of human ability. When saints are told that 'His strength is made perfect in their weakness,' and they find in their experience that 'when they are weak, then are they strong,'[3] 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,'[4] it is remarkable it should, sometimes, be deemed so important to persuade sinners of their sufficiency for every duty. Who knows not they would do more if they did not believe they could do so much? They must come at last to despair of helping themselves. Very little good, that we can see, has come of the lasting discussion of *natural and moral ability*, unless indeed it has sharpened minds for more available inquiries. It has not altered men's

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 8. [2] 1 Tim. vi. 5.
[3] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. [4] Eph. vi. 10.

primary and practical convictions, or added a cubit to their growth in holiness, a pulse to their conscious life in duty. Help them to see, adequately, their guilt and danger, and the love and completeness of a Saviour for them, and they will feel and believe. This would be treating them as reasonable creatures; but lashing them on their ability, when what they most need is a persuasion of their guilt, their proper helplessness, their adequate relief, is, to say no more of it, a questionable operation.

There is, in these days, so much said of what saints and sinners can do, with so little recognition of what they cannot do, that practical error, practical feeling, of the worst kind—a spirit of self-reliance, a contempt for old opinions, a forsaking of beaten ways, an impatience that will not let well alone, but must deface and spoil it with dashes of *self-improvement*—is in danger of coming in, yea, has come in, and threatens to flood the land with strife and irreverence—those strong spices, which scent not of the grace and faith of 'olden time.' Men need most to feel that they are self-destroyed and that all their springs are in God. In all their unaided efforts they are as 'one that beateth the air,' in regard to all spiritual execution. If they saw themselves in danger, and felt they could do nothing, they would be ready to cry for help, and

to accept of any aid that is offered to them. They would not find it so difficult to trust in the provisions and promises of a wise and gracious God—the most complete and reasonable objects of human trust in the universe. They would fly to him (ability or no ability) as their refuge and defence. This they always do, when felt necessity shuts them up to it, and, we think, never otherwise. They will try to help themselves without him, as long as they believe they can. Their unbelief, their nature, disposes them to self-dependence, and self-dependence, again, to carelessness and inaction. In short, their heedless, incurious, and unrelenting spirit is a fruit of inferred strength, a growth of infidelity, which indicates an oversight, or rather ill sight of the great truths of the gospel. It evinces that no true light has entered the heart; that the heart is not seen as a land of darkness, swarming with lies and vain imaginations, and lying under the shadow of death. Their goodness is like the blossom and fragrancy of certain plants, the growth of a poisonous root, and soon to fade, to exhale and pass away. They see at most but a part of the evil that is in them, and the other, and the worst part perhaps, passes with them for virtue. And if you are of 'the careless ones,' this is your case. Your thoughts of sin and its punishment, your thoughts of heaven and its holi-

ness, your thoughts of God, are not great enough to start you. There is too much of your own stature and likeness in them. You should value yourself very little on any ability to help yourself, or any disposition to do it, when the weightiest truths have so long failed to control your choice. It is not so important for you to feel, that you can do better than you have done, as that you must perish without help from God. All your other confidences have been insufficient, and will desert you at last: they spring from, and rest in misconceptions of essential truth. When, in the promises and threatenings of the gospel, you hear the voice of your Redeemer and Judge, and the silken cords of love do not draw you, nor the iron chains of terror move you, yield at least to the conviction, that if you are left of God with a heart so hardened, and left you may be, leaving him, your perdition is as certain as if it had already begun; and so yielding, feel your dependence, and accept the proffered deliverance, acceptable then, and only accepted by humble and contrite hearts.

If your feelings will give you leave, you will find nothing to hinder your calling on God in the spirit of fervent, *effectual* prayer; and if they give you no leave, no insight, no liberty, it is because you see not your necessities. Your hinderances may be re-

solved again into infidelity, not a doubting perhaps that religion is important, but a doubting of things which might make you *feel* it to be so. It is a doubting of the grounds of your danger, which extends to and breaks the power of all other truth.

What strange ingredients enter into this 'spirit of slumber' that has fallen upon you! You are fortified by a charm that 'leads to bewilder and dazzles to blind' you in the moment of ruin; the charm of the same serpent who tried his power on our nature in Eden, and who would lure you to believe you are like God, by blinding you to what he is. On any other supposition, your insensibility is unaccountable. No one that is a slave of sin, can remain easy in the belief that God justly regards him as he professes to regard the sinner. He must accommodate his notions of God to his own standard of excellence; he must bring him down, or ascend to him by some process; he must conceal away his guilt in God, or he must live in perpetual fear and dissatisfaction. Now, it cannot be doubted which of these alternatives you have chosen, if you are not concerned for your acceptance in his sight. Besides the fear and remorse which may lead you to seek such relief, your prospect is gilded and filled with objects, adapted to distract your vision and induce you to

level down his perfections to your own likeness. *There* you see the kingdoms of this world in all their deceitful glory and fascination, offered for your service, and waiting for your acceptance. *Here* is a company of darling lusts, passions, and expectations, which you are commanded to slay, and spare not; but they, clinging to your recollections of enjoyment, plead and claim to be retained in your service by all you remember and can anticipate of such enjoyment as they afforded, and this, too, at the very moment, when they crave new indulgence, which is always the moment, when the miseries they may hereafter bring upon you, are least likely to be feared, because those they have previously caused, are then most likely to be out of mind—the moment, when the pleasures and interests they can promote, are sure to be greatly overrated, because you are reluctantly contemplating their entire renunciation. Will you venture on, and presume that you are equal to this trial?[1] Can you trust yourself to make against such odds, and to come to a safe and impartial decision? Can you cope with passions, which long indulgence or the desire of new indulgence may change as into

[1] ....."O, sir, to wilful men,
The injuries, that they themselves procure,
Must be their schoolmasters."

angels of light,[1] always ready to give an excuse for what they have done, and a reason, and to sense a good reason, for what they propose doing; never baffled, when denied, and never convinced and abashed, when found guilty, but, as cunning sophists, (outwitting whom they master, and mastering all who trust them,) contriving new artifices for their own vindication, and devising new plans for the compassing of their own ends?

Consider, then, how strongly you are tempted so to modify your notions of God, as to make him permit the indulgence of your evil passions, and the retention of your idols, especially when you are called to exchange them for objects that have no power to charm, and for services you do not relish? Yea, is not your repose in impenitence, evidence that your conceptions of him are already so modified as to quiet your fears and favour your passions? Here is the law which is a transcript of his character. It demands that you 'love not the world nor the things of the world,' and that you 'cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.' Do you see its beauty as

[1] "When we in our viciousness grow hard,
(O misery on't) the wise gods seel our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at us, while we strut
To our confusion."

holy, just, and good? Do you see in what sense your happiness here and hereafter, is connected with obedience to it? To say you do not, is to say that you see not the word of God to be true; that you see no filthiness in the indulgence it proscribes—no beauty in the holiness it enjoins. But if you see its excellence, and your interest in obeying it, it is impossible for you to repose, while you refuse to comply with its requisitions. You might as well expect a 'proud Athos' to obey your mandate, and part with its elevation, as expect *reason* to permit you to slumber, while it has such a vision of your peril, and of the worth of the law it honours. It sees a law to which it is bound by ties which nothing can dissolve. It responds to its command, and is awe-struck with the splendour and strength of its chains. It looks at the earth beneath, and the heavens above you, and sees everywhere the features of a religion that will be approved, and cannot be bribed to allow one sinful indulgence. Your offences, in vastness and desolation, like mountains that intercept your vision of the morning sun, rise to its view. It turns with aversion and horror from the prospect, as the eagle, in its ascension to the skies, is frighted and driven back by the lightning and the tempest. It looks out again upon the immensity that is above and around you, and sees it all as the stern expression of an

enemy's countenance, whose eyes are in every place, and on whose power all things depend. Can you repose while reason has such visions, alarms, and convulsions, by which it performs upon you a work like that of the fabled vulture upon the unwasting vitals of its victim? Did you perceive the extent of your peril, the reasonableness and perfection of the law by which you are condemned, you could not rest a moment in your sins—you would fly from them, as from the quenchless flame in your dwelling—you would 'lay aside these weights,' as the swimmer would drop bars of gold, when he found they were sinking him to the bottom of the deep.

It is too evident to need farther illustration, that the species of infidelity, which we have aimed to expose, is very common—that the repose of impenitent men is inconsistent with just apprehensions of the moral attributes of God, and is therefore proof they have either concluded in their hearts with the fool, that 'there is no God,' or have changed his truth into a lie, by imagining him to be 'altogether such a one as themselves.' They may not be conscious of the process by which they have come to this conclusion. But if they could remember what has so often quieted their alarms and allayed their convictions, they might discover it was a secret peradventure that God will not bring 'every work into judgment,

with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil'—that he is not 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,' or that he will at least, when he beholds the greatness of their number, think it a pity to destroy so many. Let them watch the operations of their minds, and see how often thoughts of this character minister to their repose; how much the number with whom they are connected, reconciles them to their condition; how often their fears are quelled by the hilarity and boldness of those who have equal or more reason to tremble than themselves; how much easier they have always found it to believe what they desired, than what they feared might be true; and then, let them determine if these are not the unresisted goings-on of unbelief in their minds, by which they seem likened to God, as the apparent distance between one object and another, is shortened by the *nature* of the instrument through which it is viewed.

We have dwelt long on this subject, because we esteem it to be of great practical importance. We believe the carelessness and hardness of secular men to be owing, chiefly, to this species of infidelity. There has, too, been no lack of industry in fortifying the external defences of the Christian doctrine. Could any brightness of outward evidence, any depth of research, any cogency of argument, con-

vince them, infidelity, with whatever shape of irreligion it assumes, had long since disappeared. Still, they are not convinced; and it has seemed that they have need to turn their thoughts in upon themselves, to analyze their indifference, or at least to have some opinion of it, and to give it a proper name. This we have attempted to do, we wish we could say with as much success in convincing the reader as desire of doing so.

CHAPTER IX.

Man treated as a rational being in all the divine dispensations—No mysteries of feeling in regard to the doctrines of grace—Reason a competent judge of things necessary to salvation—Hinderances to its right exercise—Our difficulty with religion our fault—Contrariety of the sentiments and practice of Christ to human nature a ground of unbelief—Our incapacity to comprehend and believe the gospel—How acquired—How to be removed—Divine grace attainable when truly desired—Acts of holy obedience free and rational—Dispensations of grace encouraging in every scriptural view of them—Power of truth—Misconceptions of it the same thing as infidelity—Testimony of the Scriptures—Striking guilt of sinners in likening God to themselves.

If God does not presume we will act, he certainly intends we shall answer to him, as rational creatures; for he ever treats with us on this high ground, and never moves us, except so that we seem to move ourselves. He has given no attestation of his will or of our duty, makes no promises and exerts no agency on us, except such as both accord with and infer our reason. He could do his will in us, or make us do it, without this condescension to our nature; but he designs not to force or subdue our reason to the belief of the gospel. Had this been his method, he would not have said, 'Come, let us reason together;' he would not have set us an exam-

ple of obedience, and attempered his addresses to the various sensibilities of our frame; he would have spared himself the trouble of working signs, and wonders, and miracles, and have waived all other arguments, which are only appeals to reason. We are indeed encouraged to pray God 'to enlighten our minds and understandings,' to give us 'an increase of knowledge and a right judgment in all things;' but in this his spiritual operation he guards our reason; he only clears away the darkness about it, brightens the evidence of things, that we may more clearly distinguish truth from error, and better judge of his requirements as rational beings.

But we need not wind our way, cautiously, over this subject. There are mysteries in regard to our moral agency, but, happily, they are not mysteries of feeling. As Adam was 'put into the garden to keep and to dress it,'[1] so God has intrusted us with a stewardship, with the custody and culture of our hearts; and the doctrine is, 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.'[2] The direction and the reason upon which it is based, accord, perfectly, with our experience, and with all his methods of treating with us and acting on us. We may find difficulties in religion,

[1] Gen. ii. 15. [2] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

and hinderances to our faith, but our reason is, and is accounted to be, a competent judge of things necessary to be believed and understood for our salvation. If we perplex and embarrass our minds with things not necessary, not knowable by us, not revealed, or revealed only for the trial of our faith, and the incitement of our humility and admiration, we do so to our cost and peril. We assume the responsibility, we venture out of our sphere, and, if we become suspicious and disloyal subjects, we must thank our daring for it. Whatever it be which disaffects us with the truth necessary to be known and knowable by us, it is our fault. The exercise indeed of our reason in regard to things revealed and essential to salvation, depends upon our will and inclination, which, besides that they are not naturally given to dwell on these things, are apt to be engaged and taken up with pursuits and enjoyments, not only foreign, but adverse to them. Thus, at the first appearance of our Saviour, many were his enemies; his new doctrine was 'foolishness' to some, and a 'stumbling-block' to others; not that they took time to examine it, not that it wanted any proper evidence, but because his doctrine did not fall in with their prejudices and interests, nor his pretensions suit their ambitious aspirings; in which they were clearly guided, not by their reason, or the

evidence of the case, but by a perverse will and the evil possessions of their heart.

But since,—from our natural notions of right and wrong, we cannot but know, if know we will, that a revelation, coming from a holy God to unholy creatures and proposing their renovation, must cross their evil designs and affections,—any difficulty we may have or make with the truths of religion on this score, instead of diminishing their evidence to our reason, does greatly increase it. Such difficulty, however, shows that, in order to enable us fairly to examine these truths, and to believe them on appropriate and sufficient evidence, the opposition of our hearts to them must be overcome. This too seems to be taught when our Lord said, 'If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;'[1] that is, if a man has not a disposition to obey the truth, he is not in a condition to have a correct understanding of it; he is not prepared to receive the doctrine of Christ, and to believe him to be 'a teacher come from God.'

Now this disposition is far from being natural to men. When we contrast their sentiments and practice with the sentiments and practice of Christ, we see the greatest disagreement. We naturally estimate nothing as he did, and it is therefore

[1] John vii. 16, 17.

no wonder that we are 'offended in him.' He wanted worldly greatness, and though his wanting it did not make him less honourable, but rendered that so, which he did not choose to take on him, still we can hardly bear to serve him in that station in which he so meekly and greatly served us. He magnified and seemed to court the most difficult duties; but we start at difficulty, and turn back when our way is in the wilderness. The duties which cross and disaffect us, were all easy and natural to him, because his whole humour was in accordance with them. Therefore he could consent to be poor and unhonoured—a dependant upon the charity of others—but to be poor, to beg, we are ashamed. We can give bountifully perhaps to others; but sweetly to receive their charities and depend on them, that is a dignity which we can as little see to be so, as desire to attain. Indeed, there are stout pretenders to virtue, who would think it more honourable to obtain, by indirect and covert means, yea, by evident injustice and fraud, the necessaries of life, than to receive them at the hands of a willing charity. In order for them to 'know of the doctrine of Christ, whether it be of God,' it is evident that they must have a temper more in harmony with his teaching and example; they must 'know how to abound, to suffer want,' and to do all

other duties which cross our evil nature.[1] If men's opinions and practices can so prevail with us, as to be permitted to give the stamp of littleness or great-

[1] It sounds strange perhaps to speak of poverty as a duty, especially when so many are made poor by their vices, and when a volume has so recently been written, designed to prove, from the Bible, "that it is the duty of every man to become rich." This is baiting the hungry with what they like at least. But we must yet think that poverty is a duty, a great and comprehensive duty. This may appear to be a presuming and forward opinion;—

> "For, in the fatness of these pursy times,
> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg;
> Yea, curb and woo, for leave to do him good."

The contrariety of the spirit and practice of Christ to our natural feelings and conceptions is so great, and so evidently the ground of our misconceiving, and, therefore, in effect, discrediting his true character, that we shall take the liberty here to go out of our way a little to illustrate it.

It may perhaps be our duty to be poor, certainly it may be, if it is not the will of God that all should be rich. All our abuses, both of poverty and riches, are breaches of this duty. Our Saviour also gave it the place of honour in his life and instructions. And if we consider what seems to ruin so many souls, and to cause crimes to abound, we shall not wonder at it. One of the chief temptations to all the wickedness in the world is the terror of poverty. It is a great and powerful mover of unrighteousness, covetousness, extortion, and cheating. In short, what evil have men not done, through fear of being reduced to live in a low condition, or an immoderate desire of riches. If all had a right esteem of poverty, evidently we should feel much safer on every side; we should not need so many laws and prisons for the protection of rights. And what can more clearly show our want of faith in Christ, our want of a due impression of his honour and glory, than our fear and shame of that rank in the world which he chose for himself. It is proof enough how little we have of the temper of Christ, that we have so little patience with his station in the world. We seem not to know how to be honoured,

ness to all the designs and pursuits of life, we shall make ill work of estimating the doctrine and exam-

but to seek honour from that which could confer no honour on him. The character of a poor godly man we can ill bear; it is not envied, not perhaps admired by us, though it was the character of the Creator of the world when he 'dwelt among us.' Thus his doctrine must be an offence to us. Our character makes it so.

We also seem to value wise heads more than good hearts, but he sought no such distinction. He had all wisdom and learning at his command, and understood all mysteries, yet he made no display of knowledge, and was satisfied to confine himself to magnify and obey the holy law of God; he said and did nothing but what was useful to encourage humility, and holiness, and patient well-doing. Should we do so, or should we be as careful and expend as much to improve our hearts, as heads, we might become surprising proficients in holiness. And when we are good enough, if we have not sense enough, we shall be satisfied with what we have. But we clearly do not see this subject as he saw it. We have one rule of estimation; he had another and very different one. We must be in the wrong—we have lost the secret of true greatness,—rather we never had it.

We are also prone to admire and imitate the actions of great men. We reward good, and punish evil deeds, to encourage the imitation of the one, and prevent the repetition of the other. We expect to aid the cause of virtue in this way. Christ pursued the same plan, left us a life of great and worthy actions, yea, of those very actions which he requires of us; and though we are so good at imitation in other respects, yet what wretched learners and imitators in this! That we do refuse to follow so great an example, when the acts of our solicited imitation, are the acts which he will reward with eternal life, and the acts too, to which our duty draws us, is a strange perverseness, and shows that we lie under an indisposition to do what our reason approves.

> "Sure He that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused."

ple of Christ, to which both they and our hearts are opposed. If the example of the Creator cannot weigh with us as much as that of creatures, in fixing the standard of greatness, and the rule of valuing temporal things, we shall continue to hear and not understand, when the question of our duty is proposed. We are under an incapacity to comprehend and believe, which reason and conscience both condemn as our fault.

So long as lust, pride, any evil temper, or the love of the world has dominion over us, we must not only have a great indisposition to inquire after divine truths, but a great blindness to the brightness and excellency of them. We never see the full beauty, the proper evidence of any good quality, if we deem it undesirable, much less if it be adverse to our desires. Hence only 'he that is of God heareth God's word;'[1] that is, only he, that is disposed by the grace of God, obeys him. 'No one can come unto me,' says our Lord, 'except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him. No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.' Why? Because 'ye will not come to me that ye might have life.'[2] 'Light has come into the world,' and why do not men receive it? Only 'because their deeds are evil.' Why do 'they hate the

[1] John viii. 47. [2] Ib. v. 40.

light,' and turn their eyes from it? Only 'lest their deeds should be reproved.' Their indisposition to see and understand the truth, is 'the very head and front of their offending;' it is no palliation of their guilt, but the life, the growth of it, and it must be taken away before they can believe. This is the whole matter. Accordingly, 'If any man will come unto me,' says our Lord again, 'let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me;'[1] that is, if any man wishes to become his disciple, he must *first* be willing to deny himself the gains and pleasures which are most pleasing to nature; he must lay aside his weights, disengage his affections, and so he may 'take up his cross,' (a cross still, and *his* cross, too,) and 'follow on to know the Lord,'[2] yet 'not as though he had already attained, either were already perfect; but following after, if that he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus.'[3]

We must now be able to see what hinders our believing; and if we have not found it easier to lay our passions and master our inclinations in deference to the claims of religion than it falls to our experience in other cases, we shall be prepared to welcome the doctrine of divine grace, as one suited to the necessity, if not to the good pleasure, of our nature. All

[1] Matt. xvi. 24. [2] Hos. vi. 3. [3] Phil. iii. 12.

who are disposed to receive the faith of Christ, are drawn to it by the Spirit of God. He opens their hearts, as he did Lydia's, 'to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul.'[1] There is no possible discouragement in this doctrine; for, by what rule and in what measure soever it be given, we are sure that none can ever want the grace of God, who are willing to have it. It is easy for men to say they desire grace, and perhaps to persuade themselves that they desire it, but it is all a deception, if they are averse to the virtues and tempers which God requires, because this is the same thing as being averse to that operation of his Spirit which produces them. They choose to be without his grace, unless they seek it in his appointed ways, with the same earnestness as they seek other things which they want and must have. If they desire the grace of God, they will at least avoid all hinderances to it, and cease to do things contrary to it. What they want and seek on other conditions, is not what he proposes as grace. He does not give men grace, or make them holy, against their will. He indeed makes them willing, yet not as by force, but something as the sun's heat wills them to the cooling shade, or as its sweetness wills them to taste of offered fruit. As he makes us see and walk by giving us natural light and strength,

[1] Acts xvi. 14.

so he gives us spiritual light and strength, that we may do him the *reasonable* service he requires. He never deals with us more strictly as rational creatures, than he does in giving us the assistance of his Spirit, and we are never so rational in our exercises, as when we believe his truth, and love and adore his perfections,—they being so worthy of this obedience, and our rendering it an act so rational, that it makes us at once both happy and deserving to be so. Thus, while we are always failing of our duty, and have every reason, deducible from our nature and doings, to know that we shall continue to fail of it on any other plan than that which is laid in the gospel, we see that this proceeds not less upon a knowledge of our spiritual necessities, our weakness and corruption, than upon the supposition that we will do nothing, till he opens the eyes of our understanding, inclines our will to that whereto it does not naturally incline, and so 'fulfils in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith.'[1] Our endeavours and our prayers are indeed necessary; for God, who does our work for us, will never do it without us. We must have the assistance of his Spirit; but we have no ground to expect it, if we will not seek it. He must work in us his own 'fruits;' but we have no ground to expect it, unless

[1] 2 Thess. i. 11.

we do things meet to them, yea, unless 'we also labour thereto, striving according to his working.'[1] But we must 'not be high-minded,' or suppose that we can do any thing as of ourselves; for 'it is God that worketh in us to will and to do,' and all the fruit we bear, is the fruit of his Spirit, not the fruit of our prayers and doings as ours; we bear fruit indeed, but it is as branches, we owe it all to 'the fatness of the olive-tree,' not to ourselves—we 'bear not the root, but the root beareth us.'[2] How suitable then, how animating to us, is the doctrine, that we have an Intercessor on high, who has offered himself once for all unto God, and through whom, not only the good things of this life, made holy and salutary, are granted to us anew as pledges of a Father's care, but also the gift, the great, the unspeakable gift of a divine Comforter, one with the Father and the Son, to be to those who are ignorant the Spirit of knowledge, to those who are perplexed with doubts and errors the Spirit of truth, and to those who are polluted with sin, and they are all, the Spirit of holiness!

We may also see that all the hinderances to our faith are in ourselves. They are our evil desires and passions, our love of the world, 'and whatever worketh abomination or maketh a lie:' and

[1] Col. i. 29. [2] Rom. xi. 17, 18.

ontemplating their operation simply, we may resolve them all into an indisposition to attend to divine things. Now this indisposition, this drifting of the mind and the affections to sensible objects, nothing can break but the power of truth. Indeed, it has its seat in misconceptions of the truth, both as it relates to the nature of sin and to the character of God. Men who are in this condition, are not without opinions on these subjects. Their opinions may not be rational; they may be as inconsiderate as any other part of their conduct; they may not themselves be sensible of the degree of their influence, or of the mode of their operation; but they are no feeble and sickly agents; they are, and can be shown to be, strong enough to withstand the force of truth, which is always sufficient to carry right minds, and which, rightly understood, is never inconsiderable with the worst hearts. They have become so familiar with their crimes and follies by custom, that they scarcely see any demerit in them, and, of course, they do not see the truth that might present them in a true character. Their worldliness is an indefinable something, upon which the conscience never fixes any guilt, and, of course, they do not see the guiltiness of not loving God, nor that his loveliness which, if truly seen, appears so great, that we must needs love him and thirst after him, as that which exceeds all

other delights. Their sinfulness—considered as separate from acts, as a thing attached to their nature, and running through their spiritual exercises and affections, and there when not running, like distempered blood that runs or lodges in the heart and veins of the fleshly system, corrupting and bringing to decay the outward man—is of very small account with them, and, of course, they do not see it as defiling, yea, as death's corruption. In order to have a perfectly just and lively sense of the evil of sin, we must be entirely free, not only from the dominion, but from any measure of the love and practice of it; but they are confessedly under its dominion and in passion with its service. We might still proceed with proofs of their misconceptions of the truth as affecting themselves. They do not profess to disbelieve these or any similar truths, and it follows, therefore, that they must have erroneous conceptions of them; and, if we sound the matter to the bottom, we shall find that this is a chief cause of their inattention to religion; that they have, through the deceivableness of the heart, imposed upon themselves such views of their own character, as leave them little to choose between it and the holiness which is required of them, and as little to fear from the divine displeasure. In other words, they have come to imagine that God is 'altogether such a one as themselves.'

The root of the difficulty is, they want a knowledge, an understanding of the truth; they are alienated from the life of God 'through the ignorance that is in them.'

And this view of the subject, which has heretofore occupied so considerable a portion of our attention, we think accords with the Scriptures. We may justly appeal to them for testimony in reasoning with those who profess to receive them as the word of God, though we do not profess to credit their faith in them; and when they are found to foretell the difficulties men experience in believing, and their evasions and misconceptions of the truth with the causes thereof, and the prediction or resolution of the matter agrees with their own consciousness and the general analogies of human conduct, it should be a very convincing, as it is a very intelligible, proof that the Scriptures came from him who 'knew what is in man.' In confirmation of the position under review, we have already quoted some scriptural proofs, and shall now add a few more. When addressing his Christian brethren, St. Paul says, 'Now we have received, not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned.'[1] The import of this passage evidently is, that 'the things of God,' the doctrines of the gospel, both as they relate to his moral perfections, and to man's corruption and guilt, cannot be rightly apprehended without concordant feelings on his part, without those veritable and pure views and affections which are imparted through the influence of the Holy Spirit. The influence of moral character on the perceptions of the mind, and thereby presenting to us objects in our own likeness, and producing a dangerous faith, is here clearly recognised by the apostle, and this is the principle which has pervaded all our remarks upon the subject. The same truth is also taught in all that class of texts which connect our true knowledge of God, that is, our perceiving his moral perfections aright, with our love of him, or our obedience to his commands. 'He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that knoweth not God heareth not us,—thereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.'[2] And again, says the psalmist, A good understanding have all they that keep thy commandments. I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my medi-

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 12—14. [2] 1 John iv. 6—8.

tation. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.'[1] Again, there is a remarkable passage which applies expressly to our purpose, that where God is represented as directly addressing sinners who hate instruction and commit abominable iniquity, and saying, 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.'[2] We may, therefore, conclude that 'He who saith, I know God, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.'[3] He sees nothing as it is; every object bears more or less the stamp of his own character. If he saw the whole truth, the effulgence would be insufferable; if he saw it very imperfectly, yet loving what he saw, and desiring to see more, his doubts and difficulties would vanish before it, and the truth would make him 'free indeed.' Therefore, 'let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and hereby shall ye know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before God.'[4]

[1] Ps. cxix. 99. 104. [2] Ps. l. 21. [3] 1 John ii. 4.

[4] 'Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, the hearts of men are fully set in them to do evil.' If they saw the full nature and demerit of 'an evil work,' the desire of doing it would be slain, and they would die to sin. In both cases, all they want is the persuasion which a belief of the truth, the whole truth, would furnish. How important, then, is it to have correct perceptions of the

It should be distinctly noted, in connexion with this subject, that our erroneous conceptions of the truth, especially if they be allowances in our own behalf, will not only prevent our moral improvement, but sink us greatly below our present standard; for the lower our views of duty and excellence now are, the lower will be the standard which we shall be apt to fix for ourselves to attain to, in future. Our evil passions, soiled affections, and clouded minds, ever powerful for mischief, and impotent of good, if they, though constantly degenerating, are yet constantly presenting God to us in our own likeness, we shall surely have a deity at last that swiftly 'dwarfs and withers its worshippers'—

'The proper act and figure of our heart.'

The peculiar guilt of this species of infidelity is as worthy to be considered as it is unlikely to be felt. There is always a strong tincture of self-approbation in it, and if we do not give it the name of

truth; to take up with no base mixtures of it, no fanciful substitutions in its place.

If knowing God, we will love him, and if our keeping his commandments be the evidence of our knowing him, as the Scriptures teach, then, certainly, if we pretend to know him on any other ground, 'we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' The knowledge we have is not true knowledge,—that is, does not represent God and his truth as they are, but probably more, if not such, as we would have them.

faith we think it a near relation of that worthy grace.[1] And this, according to our showing, is as apt to be the case, when our iniquities are great and daring, yea, we may say more apt to be so then, because we are more blind to the nature of sin and to the beauties of holiness, than at other times. That we should be so incautious as to let our depravity run whithersoever it will, and that sin should be of such a nature as to lead us to impute the qualities which it breeds in us, to God who has none and can have none of them, shows both our great sinfulness and the great evil of sin. The guilt which we thus incur, when contrasted with what God has done for us and condescends to teach and promise on condition of our faith, spreads to an immensity which, if it be not infinite, would have been, if we could have made it so. It is the guilt not merely of using the gifts and mercies of God without thankfulness, but of so abusing and corrupting them in our hands, that it seems to impeach his wisdom that they were ever there at all—the guilt not merely of withholding the faculties he has given us from his service, but of marring their edge and fitness for it, and employing them to sully his perfections and fashion him to our-

[1] Such a faith may prevent our feeling the guilt of infidelity, but it exposes us to all its perils, affording us no blessedness here, and no assurance of any to come, yet keeping us in

> "But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
> Dreaming on both."

selves—the guilt not merely of failing to see him in the light of his creatures, but of so loving darkness as not to heed the day-dawn, the sun in whose beams they shine as the memorials and pledges of a brightness all brightness excelling. Yes, this is our guilt, the guilt of stamping our likeness on every good being, of staining with our colours the beauties we should make our own, and being so deluded with our shadows, by which the glory of every thing else is obscured, as to lose sight of the excellency of which we are—not a shadow—and that is a resemblance which it seems we strive not to attain, though it were to us a pledge of things which

> "To lose or give away, were such perdition,
> As nothing else could match."

Will you, reader, meditate on the picture? Will you think of the surprise and disappointment which must await you, if your vision is not betimes rectified and cleared? He who pampers his appetite in the feast of a dream, may awake and find himself famishing for food; but what will be your consternation, when your fancies give place to the real glories of that Being, who 'thou thoughtest was altogether such a one as thyself?' He who is chased by assassins in the sleep of night, awakes, exhausted perhaps by his efforts to escape, yet finding himself reposing unmolested on his bed; but your disappointment,

what will it be, when you awake from your day-dreams of acceptance at the bar of God, and feel yourself just kindling with 'eternal burnings,' and discover then first, that the 'gulf' between him and your own soul, which you had imagined to be but a delightful vale through which you could pass at any moment, is indeed impassable,

"The dark, unbottom'd, infinite abyss."

If this will be a surprise all surprise beyond, and if the prospect of it be terrible, what must the reality be? Our thoughts cannot attain to it, and words are too feeble to express that to which we can attain. It is for you to reflect, whether you have a faith which works by love and purifies the heart, which dissatisfies you with yourself, and makes you feel that you can be satisfied only with the likeness of God. Such a faith you must have, or you must be indulging notions of the divine perfections which conceal your guilt, and which, if rested in, will bring upon you this last surprise. Dreams they are in which you seem to be growing rich, while that which you have, is taken away; in which you seem to be in health and security, while the work of death is going on; in which perhaps you seem to be brightening into the image, and glowing with the flames of a seraph, while you are darkening into the likeness, and burning with the fires of

a fiend. The delusion is indeed a specious one. You may love and cherish it, and it may abide with you in life and in death, but it will dissolve in the lustre of the 'great day.' What you want is the seasonable and patient application of your thoughts to it, and to the means of your recovery from it.[1] Were

If we do not deceive ourselves, the species of infidelity of which we speak, finds no little encouragement in the spirit and action of the present times. We venture to think that an impatience of reflection, a taste for light reading and preaching if you please, and a thirst for designless excitement prevail, which tend to dwarf the faith of men, to unsettle well informed opinions, and to satisfy them with the fiction of truth and religion. They are stirred up to action, but not tempered and moulded to the truth. Fixed and certain principles of faith, showing their legitimate effects in the conduct, do not constitute the fashion of the day. The public mind seems to be at sea, without sufficient ballast to steady it—top-light, and without any direction that can safely be calculated upon.

Now, all this bustle, this 'flying from pillar to post,' this 'drifting before the wind,' must excite and nourish sense, and break up and prevent that calm contemplation which is the nurse of faith. It certainly turns our thoughts from ourselves and thus prevents that self-acquaintance, the want of which makes us doubt the true character of all corruption in us, and of all excellence foreign to us. It makes this world, with its movements and interests so important and stirring, that we can scarcely get a moment, certainly not a disposition, to think of any thing in separation from them. With the great majority, as to the attention which they pay to spiritual concerns, it seems indeed that

> "Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more;——a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

Men want reflection, a breaking off of their hold on the world, and a steadier looking to the great truths which are set out for their

your temporal interest in like peril, you would not rest unconcerned, nor would you leave what you considered most valuable to you, in this life, to chance attentions, and to the impotency of desires and hopes that spring from no knowledge of their object, and do nothing to attain it, yea, and hinder your doing any thing to that end. We say, again, your case is such, and your reason so competent to judge of it, that you seem to want most a humour to meditate on it. You take no proper cognizance of what is going on in yourself, none of what God

guides, and from which they are to draw life eternal. But the times do not favour the change. They foster the evil, and a great evil it is that they do. Men are not in tranquil moods, though the times are peaceable. The winds of passion swell and give direction to every thing. Men must have figures of fancy and glowing colours of truth; the thing itself is but a dead fact, cold and narrow,—a sun in clouds, whose heat is like that of the stove, without light and cheerless. They appear palsied in a measure to every thing but fiction and storms. The inquiry is, what they can do with this or that, not what it is; how this end can be reached by a cross-path, not what is the safe and appointed road to it; how this man can be brought to serve a certain purpose, not how he is to be informed and convinced as a rational creature. Very few seem to love the truth for the truth's sake, without any foreign ends, and fewer still to see that goodness and the love of truth are identical, going together as cause and effect. Nothing but the brush of things takes their attention, and they feel and see only in a blaze. They make no intellectual progress, that is, none in a continuous direction, but eddy round and round, best pleased to be in a whirl. Faith and principle they can have little, and their opinions, which they advance to the place of these, give way with every press, and change with every huzza for new things. And here we leave the matter.

is, and how shall you believe? You hear, or might hear, a voice as that of sweetest music in the promises and provisions of his grace, and in the blessings of peace and plenty; you hear, or might hear, a noise as that of thunder in his threatenings and judgments; but you do not discern that this melody, or this noise, comes from him; you take both his judgments and his mercies as natural accidents and emergencies, which would come to pass, though there were no dealing and speaking between God and man. Not only do you not hear him in the sound of these his organs, but you neither know nor hear when he comes out of the whirlwind, and the cloud, and the promise, and speaks to you, as it were, 'face to face,' yea, and as with his own, his full voice in Jesus Christ. Alas, that the Creator should so spend the riches of his power and wisdom in fitting up and furnishing this their earthly habitation, and the more exceeding riches of his grace and love, that he might raise them to a fellowship with himself, and to more durable and glorious mansions in the skies, and still find it so difficult, let alone their heart, to gain the eye or the ear of his creatures!

CHAPTER X.

Inferences growing out of or consistent with the principles of the preceding discussion—Doctrines of religion viewed in relation to our spiritual necessities—Mode of justification—Due esteem of Divine grace—Operation of faith—Its effects rational—Agency of the Spirit—His fruits contrasted with the works of the flesh—Just deductions of reason—Contrariety of Christianity to our corrupt nature a proof of its divine origin—Reason competent to judge of this—The assistance it gives to faith—Obligation it imposes on us to believe strongly—Justness of our thoughts of God depending on the purity of our hearts—Conceptions of holy men contrasted with those of the wicked—Necessity of a light that tries and purifies.

If we suppose the reader to be convinced of his sinfulness and unbelief, and filled with distress, what can he do? He sees that God is just and holy, and will by no means clear the guilty. But he learns that he can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Still he feels his nature is corrupt, and that sin attaches to all he does, and how shall he have deliverance from it? He learns that the blood of Christ releases him not only from the condemnation of sin, but procures for him the grace and power by which it may be successfully resisted, and shall be finally overcome. After trying every thing else for relief, and finding none, will he not here say, that which I sought is found? I have nothing to pay, and

here is a salvation without price. I want something to recommend me to a holy God, and here is a recommendation which he cannot despise and must needs honour. I am defiled with sin, and here is a fountain that washes away its every stain. I am weak and can have no confidence in myself, but here is strength sufficient for me, strength omnipotent, and yet mine to employ. This, surely, is all my salvation, and all my desire.

How holy and how averse soever to sin the Scriptures represent God to be, (and considered as an infinite and perfect Being we cannot conceive too highly of him in this respect,) and how short soever we may come of his holiness and of the requirements of his law, neither is proper ground for doubting the testimony of the Scriptures, or the fitness of God to be the happy portion of creatures even so sinful and unworthy as we are; for in the plan whereby he proposes to save us, and confer on us this blessedness, it is contrived, as with design to meet this objection to our faith and joy, to put so high glory on us, that God in heaven shall know no man from his Son so as not to see the very righteousness of his Son in that man, and that no man there shall be so humble, so deformed, or any way so inconsiderable, as that the angels shall not desire to look upon his face as expressing the very beauty of Christ himself, a distinc-

tion which they must needs regard as very glorious in itself, and as making him no less so on whom it is conferred, or rather whose it is as a nature.

How honourable to us, how wonderful in wisdom and grace, is the plan of our salvation! How complete is its adaptation to our wants—to the ends, the great and glorious ends, which it proposes to answer in us! If we would honour God, we must see that we honour this his peculiar work. He has set it apart in all its operations, and parts, and issues, as eminently *his* work. We are assured in his word that the end of our salvation is, that we may be 'to the praise of the glory of his grace.'[1] The Son of God, who is the unspeakable gift of his grace, and the foundation of all blessing, is he that quickens us. The Spirit of God is called 'the Spirit of grace,' and is given to make us partakers of his 'grace and truth.' The law of God entered, that when sin should abound, we might know of its abounding, and that 'grace might much more abound.' The gospel is called 'the gospel of the grace of God,' and the end of it is, that as sin had reigned unto death, so grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life. This treasure, too, is committed unto earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might all be of God, insomuch, that though the doc

[1] Eph. i. 6.

trine of Christ be the means of turning our souls to God, yet it is but a means, an instrument, that the efficacy of it might be seen to depend upon the power of God, and that though we should have a due esteem of the planting and watering of the word, we might, at the same time, know that if even Paul plant, and Apollos water, yet it is God only who can give the increase. The design, on our part, of magnifying his grace, should appear to us a chief duty, a great and worthy design indeed, when 'the only wise God our Saviour' takes such care to guard its glory, and lays its foundations in such depths. If the Scriptures do not deceive us, we shall never succeed, if we slight this wonderful plan in any of its parts. If the blessings which it confers be so very great as to bear any proportion to the expense and care on the part of God in procuring them, then well is it, if we make them ours; but double, unutterable is the folly of our unbelief, if we think to gain them on other conditions than his own.

It is not however more certain that God engages to perform all things for us, than that, if let alone, we could and would do nothing adequate to attain the end of our salvation; and yet, if we look to the commencement and progress of divine life in the soul, we shall see that nothing is done but in perfect accordance with our rational nature, meeting at every

point both what we are and what we need. And if we could be as rational in considering and embracing it, as the provision is rational in its design and operation, we should be 'wise unto salvation.'

"There is," says Dr. Donne, "a step towards God before we come to faith, which is to understand; God works first upon the understanding; he proceeds in our conversion and regeneration as he did in our first creation. Then man was nothing; but God breathed not a soul into that nothing, but of a clod of earth he first made a body, and then into that body he infused a soul. Man in his regeneration is nothing, and does nothing. His body is not verier dust in the grave, till a resurrection, than his soul is dust in the body, till a resuscitation by grace. But then this grace does not work upon this nothingness in man, upon this mere privation; but grace finds out man's natural faculties, and exalts them to a capacity and susceptibility of the working thereof, and so by the understanding infuses faith." Agreeably, as we see, God first sends out his light and truth, and then calls on all men everywhere to repent and believe; he begins his instructions at the understanding. He does not first say, I will make thee believe, but, as here, 'I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or the mule, which

have no understanding; which must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.'[1] And 'the entrance of his word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.'[2]

The same reason and adaptation will be perceived if we look farther on in the divine life; if we trace faith working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world, the three special effects which the Scriptures ascribe to it. Take notice, too, that they are the very effects which it is necessary should be wrought in us; for we are not naturally prone to love God, neither are we naturally pure, and the objects we choose and the affections we let out on them cannot purify us, nor are we naturally disposed or competent to subdue and overcome the love of the world; but faith can do all this, and the process is perfectly agreeable to our rational nature. It unfolds new and incomparably attractive objects of affection and hope, and points to God as the source and centre of them, and we must needs love him, as we will always love that which is most lovely to our view, and we must needs seek him too, as we will always seek that which appears most estimable and desirable, and he will then appear not only so estimable and desirable as nothing else can, but he is really so estimable and desirable, that our loving

[1] Ps. xxxii. 8, 9. [2] Ps. cxix. 130.

him shall make him ever appear more and more so for ever; and so shall faith purify our hearts, as they cannot but be purified in loving what is pure, and enable us to overcome the world, as we cannot but feel ourselves masters of it, when we have an object that so transcends it, and are filled with desires and hopes carrying us upward, and not deigning so much as to light on things below.

This is all agreeable to the truest philosophy—and we can judge of it for ourselves. We may also see the same wisdom in the work which the Spirit has to accomplish in us. It is a wonderful work, yet a work meeting, so completely and rationally, the necessities of our nature, that we must be very stupid not to believe it of Divine appointment, a witness to ourselves, that should command our faith in the word of God.

There is a secret life of the good man which is carried on, without the observation of the world. What most distinguishes him is, that he has 'the secret of the Lord,' a light and agency from him, one enabling him to see moral qualities aright, and the other disposing and helping him in the fight of faith and holiness. When he rightly understands, and avails himself of these, he is full of light and power, that is, he has the strength and the Spirit of the Lord,—the one having this condition, that it can

be perfected in his weakness, and the other this office, that he is sent to dwell in him, to enlighten, sanctify, actuate, and mould him to his likeness. He has an armour and all needful instructions provided for him, but without these aids he can do nothing; his strength is weakness, his mind is darkness, his heart is prepossessed, and indisposed to good. Now, the great difficulty he experiences in making progress, after he has been enlightened and turned to righteousness, is, that having been used to do it, he is still prone and tempted to walk in his own strength and in the sight of his own eyes. He follows the gleaming light of his passions and desires—that glowing of insects which is never seen except when true effulgence is withdrawn—and no wonder that he stumbles, falls back, and complains of 'the body of this death.' 'Without me,' says Christ, 'ye can do nothing,' and he is acting on the faith of his own capacity. We must believe God fully, or we shall profit little by a belief of him in part. We should especially trust him in things which our 'confidence in the flesh' prompts us to discredit. We should be most suspicious of allowances which import our strength and importance. We should be jealous of any goodness which gives us confidence in ourselves. We should be alarmed at any peace of conscience which is not 'through

our Lord Jesus Christ.' What we think of ourselves is not so much a proof of what we are, as what we think of Christ, what we are ready to do for him, and what we expect of him. In his light alone we see light. What we see in us that is not of him, is of the earth and earthy. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us; he leads us into the truth of Christ; he seals us unto the day of the redemption of Christ. We have nothing to do with God out of Christ, nor has he any thing to do with us, but in him we may be 'a habitation of God through the Spirit.' 'Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.' It overcomes the world, because it is not of it, and aspires to God above. The strength by which the victory is won, is seen to be of God, and is referred to the fact that the man is 'created anew,' and his heart become the seat of the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit. In this dependence is all the affluence of his strength. The omnipotence of grace puts itself forth in arms of flesh, and the soldier of the cross is thus made *mighty*. The Holy Spirit, having renewed the soul, exerts his own gracious power in it; so that there need be no weakness at all in the Christian. He girds his loins about 'with truth,' imparts to him that holiness which is as a breast-plate for his protection, inspires him with wisdom and might in

the Scriptures, indites his petitions, and gives him power with God in prayer, and power against sin and the devil. Thus the work goes on. His spiritual foes are numerous, but the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, in the exercise and strength of which he strives against them, are numerous also.

And it is not difficult to see the order and the wisdom of the process, so far as its adaptation to our nature is to be considered. The *works* of the flesh, and the *fruits* of the Spirit, as they are termed in the Scriptures, are opposites, and the only question as to complete success, unless we fail by our wilful choice, is answered by inquiring which of these hosts has the strongest and wisest leader. There is no inequality of numbers, and they stand breast to breast, in nature and design opposite and irreconcilable. There is a separate and mighty energy of grace for every opposing and rebellious appetite, temptation, and sin. For illustration look at the array. Love to God opposes itself to all other immoderate attachments. Joy in believing is opposed to despondency and inaction. The 'peace of God' is opposed to variances, strifes, and contentions. Meekness is opposed to resentments and complaints. Gentleness, *kindness*, contends against envy, jealousy, and implacability. Charity, into which all other graces run as if to make one pervading perfec-

tion, contends against hatred, pride, and every thing that is not like itself, lovely and of good report. We might proceed further, but let it be observed that these and all other *fruits* of the Spirit are working in this manner to demolish the 'natural man' with his 'corrupt affections and lusts.'

We trust the process of this operation is intelligible, and that the Christian will see his need of the Spirit, that with him he can do all things, and without him absolutely nothing.

We see also how the Spirit exerts his agency in the soul. All the desires and affections of the 'carnal mind' have their opposites in the products of his influence. What he has begun, if we oppose it not but strive with him, he will accomplish. He will do nothing without and contrary to our wills. That so great blessedness which he proposes, he will not so confer but we shall have it by our choice, and, if not a share of merit in its procurement, at least an agency that bespeaks our capacity for receiving and enjoying it. Man's virtues and powers are so inconsiderable, that we seem to see best his responsibility and greatness in his *capacity* to take on, or rather, to decline a divine nature, to drive away from him the Agent of such glory to himself. But the Christian who does this, or thinks to do any good thing, without courting his presence and aid, is

guilty of a folly which is so great, that our attempts to describe it but obscure its wonders. That an angel can go out from the bosom and favour of God we can, with difficulty, believe, but when permitted to return, after tasting for a while the bitterness and anguish, the remorse and shame of sin and exile, that he should fly back to his place just as the droppings and the beams of heaven were pouring upon him again—this is what we cannot believe—this is a choice which must more than double his folly; but how it must affect the guilt, to what measure it must stretch the folly of one who returns to the borders of such blessedness by a way that is sprinkled with the blood of the Son of God—this is what we best express without expression!

This blessed Agent, by which every thing good is wrought in us, is too little considered by pious people. If we read the writings of the inspired apostles, we shall find him the abounding subject of instruction and admonition. If we look at the plan of salvation, and the mode in which it is applied and made effectual to its end, we shall find that though it is a finished work, full of grace and truth, and shines like the sun, making it all light around, yet it is unapproachable by us, till the Spirit brings to us the good gifts of its purchase, and works in us that acceptance of them which makes them ours. He

breathes into us the breath of a new life, and diffuses over the soul the beams of his own excellence; and the life that begins in him, can continue only by him, and act only through him,—he acting in us, and yet we so acting that all our action is ours in responsibility, and his in worth and acceptance. The Christian has no merit, if it be not merit, which is not merit but duty, to welcome and cherish the aids which are proffered to him, and which so do every thing for him that he can do nothing without them. This is the reason why genuine humility is made so favourite and distinguished a grace in the Scriptures, that it seems to comprise all others. It is a necessary fruit of all true knowledge of ourselves and of God. All that we have done or cannot do, all that God has done or will do for us, has a tendency to produce it, when justly considered. A proud, vain, conceited Christian, can have no experience of Christianity. He may have zeal, he may have the sentiment of religion; but the faith, the principles—the bones of the system—he has little relish for these, and there is a chance that he may have little charity for those who have. The humble man is not likely to attempt any thing in his own strength, and is never so well pleased as when he best knows that God does all things for him. He thinks not to pray without the Spirit, not to speak advisedly with-

out him, not to resist temptation without him, not to understand the Scriptures without him, and of course continues humble; he has nothing to exalt himself, though God is greatly exalted in him and he in God.

When we can invent or conceive any possible plan whereby the corruption of our nature can be met and overcome in a way more rational, more comprehensible, more easy of belief, than it is by that of the gospel, we may venture to discredit and reject this; but, till then, we can scarcely give stronger proof of the truth of the Scriptures than by our indifference or opposition to this. The Scriptures do not presume that we will act with reason on this subject, though they leave us without excuse for not acting so. They are so ordered, and the scheme of divine grace has such depth of wisdom in it, and proceeds upon such a foresight of what our nature is, as that, when we come to a right mind, (a mind that perceives the truth without any bias from an evil heart, or in spite of such bias,) and come to this mind we must, nothing shall appear so irrational, and, if we could doubt then, so incredible, as the difficulties we now make with religion, especially with the method of our deliverance from the curse and the dominion of sin. One would think indeed that we must be affectedly blind and stupid, or wantonly indo-

lent and thoughtless, or frowardly vain and perverse, to stick at this doctrine, and not see in the adaptation of all its parts and agencies to our nature and to the accomplishment of the ends it proposes, the most convincing evidence of its truth, and of that our great necessity which it comes to relieve. Men, who trouble themselves with this doctrine as presented in the Scriptures, or who do not trouble themselves to know and understand it, and therefore, in either case, virtually discredit it, discrediting their need of it, and actually reject it, not complying with its conditions, believe that there is a God, that goodness is one of his principal attributes, that he has a special regard to man as one of his noblest creatures, and capable of knowing and judging of his dispensations, and would believe as much as this, if God had not revealed it, because their reason would collect it from observation of notorious and otherwise unaccountable appearances in nature and providence; and, therefore, if they do not doubt the sinfulness and misery of their state, nor doubt that God will show mercy to sinners, it is singular that their reason should not close with the doctrine of his grace as the only relief which it is reasonable to conceive; for if any relief be admissible, (and men who slight this doctrine always expect it in some way,) and God has made known no other way of granting it,

reason, left to itself, and comparing and weighing things to be believed with things known, would infer that this is indeed God's method, and that, as coming from him, it must be a wise, benevolent, and unchangeable one, suited, in all respects, to its end, 'even our salvation.' And our reason seems to be treated and addressed as having this responsibility and capacity of judging in the case. The appeal is strong to the reason of man, when our Saviour says, 'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day;' and again, 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not;' 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, and done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin.' This language implies that our believing is a thing so reasonable, that it is the most unreasonable thing in the world not to believe. And so it is, and so it will appear, when 'the word shall judge us in the last day.'

If we would consider the system with half the candour and thoughtfulness, which its importance, as concerning us, should entitle it to—consider it in its several parts, in its applicability to our exigencies, and in its final result, the working of that charity in us which is 'the fulfilling of the law,' and which, as

nothing else does or can do, makes us both happy and deserving to be so, reason would at least carry us to a faith that would not let us rest on other foundations, especially on foundations laid in the exceptions and fancies which our corruptions take against this, as humbling, or rather, as exalting us in a way that does not humble God, raising us, not bringing him down to make us meet. "Concerning faith, the principal object whereof is that eternal verity which hath discovered the treasures of hidden wisdom in Christ; concerning hope, the highest object whereof is that everlasting goodness which in Christ doth quicken the dead; concerning charity, the final object whereof is that incomprehensible beauty which shineth in the countenance of Christ the Son of the living God; concerning these virtues, the first of which, beginning here with a weak apprehension of things not seen, endeth with an intuitive vision of God in the world to come; the second beginning here with a trembling expectation of things far removed, and as yet only heard of, endeth with real and actual fruition of that which no tongue can express; the third beginning here with a weak inclination of heart toward Him unto whom we are not able to approach, endeth with endless union, the mystery of which is higher than the reach of the thoughts of us men; concerning these, without

which there can be no salvation, was there ever mention made saving only in that law which God himself hath from heaven revealed?"[1] Surely reason should be carried by the argument which Christianity contains itself. It is a sun of unparalleled brightness; we have no beams, and we can imagine none, to match with it: but it is to us unbelievers a sun in clouds, yet making the day lightsome, which would otherwise be totally dark. The clouds, however, are all our own,—and if we would steadily apply the piercing eye of reason to the great object, they would soon clear away and leave us to admire and rejoice in the surpassing light.

We may further infer the truth of the Christian religion from the fact that it represents God to be 'such a one' as corrupt men are not prone to conceive him to be. And it is evident it represents him to be such a being as he is, or that we have no knowledge of him; for the knowledge it imparts accords with the best knowledge we can derive of him from other sources, and no other religion teaches any thing that is consistent with our ideas of his perfections. It alone requires us to honour him, as it seems agreeable to reason he should wish to be honoured, not with external pomp, or with the sacrifice of human or other victims, but in spirit and in

[1] Ecclesiastical Polity, Book i. p. 265.

truth, with love, adoration, and praise. In a word, it alone represents him, not in the moral likeness of man, but in that pure likeness which it would confer on man as unworthy, and in this it is that the evidence of its divine origin shines most. Other religions represent him in the moral likeness of man; they ascribe to him the passions and the virtues of man; and it must be so in a religion of merely human origin, because man, in the darkness and corruption of his nature, can have no higher model of excellence than himself by which to regulate his notions of God,—and because, also, his conceptions, under any advantages, of a higher being than himself, will be modified by the cherished propensities of his evil nature. This truth is confirmed by all pagan notions of the worship and character of a supreme deity. These notions, too, will be found absurd and revolting in proportion to the ignorance and viciousness of those by whom they are entertained. Are their employments ever so unlawful, they are the employments in which they expect to engage in a future world. Are their highest pleasures ever so degrading, they are the pleasures with which they expect and desire to be rewarded. Are their religious rites ever so cruel, and their modes of worship ever so frivolous, by these their deities are supposed to be delighted and honoured

How unlike the God the Christian religion teaches us to contemplate, as requiring of his rational creature, man, a purity and elevation of character which he does not naturally exhibit; as making his supreme felicity hereafter to consist in employments for which he has little relish here, and in which it does not presume he can find his appropriate delight until renewed in the likeness of his Creator! If all religions were arraigned at the bar of reason, like so many suspected criminals, would not this one have a witness to the truth of its pretensions, in its very judge? Does it not meet man in a condition for which he seems not adapted, making provisions for its evils by presenting objects to his affections and hopes more worthy of his exalted nature, and furnishing the means by which he may be qualified to obtain and enjoy them? Does it not bear witness of its superior origin by making the God it obeys, possessed of attributes which accord with the principles of enlightened conscience—a Being such as depraved men, without his assistance, have never imagined, and such as all experience proves they would not 'have rule over them?' Such a religion, it is to be presumed, will be doubted by evil men, or believed with such modifications and relaxations of its demands as will make it virtually a religion invented by their passions,—an angel sent from heaven to

succour their security in delusion and impenitence. A religion not doubted in either of these senses by profligate men is one evidently by which they are approved, which neither elevates the character of man, nor seeks nor receives the smiles of Heaven. The doubts of such men, with regard to the Christian religion, justify the presumption that its origin is divine. But reason approves the voice of revelation which calls upon them to believe that their infidelity is the offspring of guilt. The more the religion they doubt is investigated, the more will its evidences, its beauties, and hidden wonders be unfolded; but the contrary is true with respect to every other. This, too, covets their closest observation—it lightens through universal nature—it comes to them in the attire of heavenly peace—it appeals to their fears in thunders, and to their kindly sympathies in the accents of love—and all to awaken their attention and gain their heart.

We think, then, that the contrariety of human character to the demands of the Christian religion, is just what we should expect from a system proposing the elevation of man, and bringing against him the charge of guilt. No wonder, indeed, that we see the rule of its estimation differing from that of man; if it were not so, it would command little reverence from him, and he would turn it off as impertinent to

his wants, and as incompetent to the task of convincing him of his guilt, or of delivering him from it, should he be convinced. Still, as it is, it is not as he would have it, and clearly not as he would have made it—but in this consists both its worthiness of God, and its suitableness to man. Our exception to it, is but a plea in behalf of ourselves, a vindication of our sins, a calling in question of the wisdom of God in a way that does both prove it, and our incapacity of judging in the case. Both our complaints against the system, and our misconceptions of it, may be safely understood to presume its truth—the one as arguing our guilt, and therefore our duty to comply with it, and our need of the relief it brings—the other, yea both as proving its excellency to be above our experience and taste, and therefore above our understanding, and worthy of the divine descent which it claims.

Now, when we find that all other systems of religion are like ourselves, and therefore needing that which we need—are but the shows of the things, not the things themselves, which are necessary to bring us relief, it should not be an inconsiderable or vain thing with us, that we find Christianity, when contrasted with the developements of our fallen nature and with our felt necessities, a system so agreeable to our reason, that it must own itself baf

fled in every argument against it, and so replete with the knowledge of ourselves, that it seems to 'tell us all things that ever we did,' and to require of us all that our conscience had, as it were, before suspected to be our duty. We are rational creatures; and how shall we answer it to ourselves, and to God who gave us our reason, and speaks to it 'as no man ever spoke,' and therefore so, that we must needs know it is himself and not another, how shall we answer it, if we do not act rationally on this the subject most worthy of the homage of our reason, and disclosing to us objects of affection and hope which should bear us above all the difficulties sense and matter oppose to our faith? As that which is rooted in the prophecies, has its full blossom in the gospel, and becomes thence the greatest of trees, and is dropping in abundance the richest of fruits, so doctrines carrying in them so bright a divinity, that our words of exception, like the scoffs of old, 'Behold your king,' 'This is the king of the Jews,' do indeed speak the truth which they mean not—doctrines so proportioned to our reason, so rooted therein, that there can be no reason but in believing them—should have a full bloom in our faith, and bring forth onward 'sixty' and a 'hundred-fold' of fruit,—making us, not the dry limbs, not the adhering moss that has a life from it, though not assimilating with it, but the lively and

growing branches of the 'tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.'

When God so condescends to us, and gives us such types of himself, yea, and of our reason too, in the grace of the gospel, shall we refuse to rest ourselves on the bosom of his promise, and look further for a provision that suits our case, or further than this he has made, for a pledge of fair and open access, or of sweet and honourable entrance into the everlasting favour of Him with whom we have to do? It is good to think often that we are reasonable creatures, and that God calls us only to a reasonable service. He treats us as wise, yet having much to learn, and therefore we may not presume; he provides for us as sinful and helpless, yet assuring us of strength, which trusting we cannot fail, and therefore we may not despair. If we have not faith, let reason exercise itself to soften the heart to receive it, as wax the seal, and then shall we know what we believe, and why and how we came to that happy state. If we have faith, and it be 'as a grain of mustard seed,' still well is it, well indeed, if we exercise our reason to give it an intelligent growth, a growth of truth. Then shall all matters between God and our reason be evenly adjusted, and the 'mountains remove hence,' and leave us 'strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.' "Implicit

believers, ignorant believers, the adversary may swallow; but the understanding believer, he must chew, and pick bones, before he come to assimilate him, and make him like himself. The implicit believer stands in an open field, and the enemy will ride over him easily; the understanding believer is a fenced town, and he hath outworks to lose before the town be pressed; that is, reasons to be answered, before his faith be shaken, and he will sell himself dear, and lose himself by inches, if he be sold or lost at last; and therefore, *sciant omnes*, let all men know, that is, endeavour to inform themselves, to understand."[1]

Finally, we see from every part of this investigation, and reason teaches us as much, that the correctness of our thoughts of God must depend upon the purity of our hearts. We may speak of him in language worthy of his greatness, we may be eloquent in his praises, but it is all sound, if God as he is, is not the object of our love, if there exists in the heart a secret repugnance to his purity. It is to no purpose that we, as others, profess to admire and know God, if we are not, like them, 'partakers of his holiness.' In that case, we are like the wretched profligate who intrudes himself into the society of the virtuous, and affects to enter into their sympa-

[1] Dr. Donne's Sermon on Acts ii. 36.

thies, to appreciate and manifest delicacies of sentiment he has never felt, and virtues he does not wish to possess—like him who has learned to pronounce a foreign language which he cannot translate into his own, and thus reads in it, without emotion or understanding, passages by which those who hear him are moved and delighted.

If there be a tendency of our minds to level down the perfections of God to corresponding qualities in our own nature, the more we 'purify our hearts in obeying the truth' the more worthy will be our conceptions of him, and the more will we rejoice and 'give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.' In proportion as we ascend in likeness to him, we shall think worthily of him. But if we do not love what he loves, and hate what he hates, if we are not quick to perceive and approve the manifestations of his will and perfections, reason adjudges that we take heed, 'lest the light that is in us be darkness,' lest we desire rather to liken him to ourselves, than to be assimilated to his perfections. The light we have, if it does not elevate our conceptions, and purify and warm our affections, is not 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God;' this is as a brightness from the face of God—a sun in us; that is a fitter emblem of a winter's evening, cold as it is clear—a moonshine which is to us but an earnest of night.

"The wisdom of God created understanding fit and proportionate to truth, the object and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible. If our understanding have a film of ignorance over it, or be blear with gazing on other false glisterings, what is that to truth? If we would but purge with sovereign eye-salve that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us, then we would believe the Scriptures protesting their own plainness and perspicuity."[1] We must look above ourselves, if we would not fall below what we are. We must close our eyes to the deceitful gleams of our own virtues, and accustom them to a more serene, and pure, and healthful effulgence. We must kindle with the discovery of higher glories, pant for assimilation to nobler objects, and drink in purer streams than those of earth. We must look steadily to a brightness that makes glorious all on whom it looks. We may be overcome with it, as Daniel, when his 'comeliness within him was turned into corruption,' or as Isaiah, when he exclaimed, 'wo is me, for I am a man of unclean lips,' but, 'like gold that is tried in the furnace,' we shall be the purer and the brighter.

[1] Milton.

THE END.

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